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THE WEIGHT OF OBLIGATION

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Crimson Gardenia and Other Tales of Adventure*, by Rex Beach

This is the story of a burden, the tale of a load that irked a strong man's shoulders. To those who do not know the North it may seem strange, but to those who understand the humors of men in solitude, and the extravagant vagaries that steal in upon their minds, as fog drifts with the night, it will not appear unusual. There are spirits in the wilderness, eerie forces which play pranks; some droll or whimsical, others grim.

Johnny Cantwell and Mortimer Grant were partners, trail-mates, brothers in soul if not in blood. The ebb and flood of frontier life had brought them together, its hardships had united them until they were as one. They were something of a mystery to each other, neither having surrendered all his confidence, and because of this they retained their mutual attraction. Had they known each other fully, had they thoroughly sounded each other's depths, they would have lost interest, just like husbands and wives who give themselves too freely and reserve nothing.

They had met by accident, but they remained together by desire, and so satisfactory was the union that not even the jealousy of women had come between them. There had been women, of course, just as there had been adventures of other sorts, but the love of the partners was larger and finer than anything else they had experienced. It was so true and fine and unselfish, in fact, that either would have smilingly relinquished the woman of his desires had the other wished to possess her. They were young, strong men, and the world was full of sweethearts, but where was there a partnership like theirs, they asked themselves.

The spirit of adventure bubbled merrily within them, too, and it led them into curious byways. It was this which sent them northward from the States in the dead of winter, on the heels of the Stony River strike; it was this which induced them to land at Katmai instead of Illiamna, whither their land journey should have commenced.

"There are two routes over the coast range," the captain of the Dora told them, "and only two. Illiamna Pass is low and easy, but the distance is longer than by way of Katmai. I can land you at either place."

"Katmai is pretty tough, isn't it?" Grant inquired.

"We've understood it's the worst pass in Alaska." Cantwell's eyes were eager.

"It's a heller! Nobody travels it except natives, and they don't like it. Now, Illiamna--"

"We'll try Katmai. Eh, Mort?"

"Sure! They don't come hard enough for us, Cap. We'll see if it's as bad as it's painted."

So, one gray January morning they were landed on a frozen beach, their outfit was flung ashore through the surf, the life-boat pulled away, and the Dora disappeared after a farewell toot of her whistle. Their last glimpse of her showed the captain waving good-by and the purser flapping a red table-cloth at them from the after-deck.

"Cheerful place, this," Grant remarked, as he noted the desolate surroundings of dune and hillside.

The beach itself was black and raw where the surf washed it, but elsewhere all was white, save for the thickets of alder and willow which protruded nakedly. The bay was little more than a hollow scooped out of the Alaskan range; along the foot-hills behind there was a belt of spruce and cottonwood and birch. It was a lonely and apparently unpeopled wilderness in which they had been set down.

"Seems good to be back in the North again, doesn't it?" said Cantwell, cheerily. "I'm tired of the booze, and the street-cars, and the dames, and all that civilized stuff. I'd rather be broke in Alaska--with you--than a banker's son, back home."

Soon a globular Russian half-breed, the Katmai trader, appeared among the dunes, and with him were some native villagers. That night the partners slept in a snug log cabin, the roof of which was chained down with old ships' cables. Petellin, the fat little trader, explained that roofs in Katmai had a way of sailing off to seaward when the wind blew. He listened to their plan of crossing the divide and nodded.

It could be done, of course, he agreed, but they were foolish to try it, when the Illiamna route was open. Still, now that they were here, he would find dogs for them, and a guide. The village hunters were out after meat, however, and until they returned the white men would need to wait in patience.

There followed several days of idleness, during which Cantwell and Grant amused themselves around the village, teasing the squaws, playing games with the boys, and flirting harmlessly with the girls, one of whom, in particular, was not unattractive. She was perhaps three-quarters Aleut, the other quarter being plain coquette, and, having been educated at the town of Kodiak, she knew the ways and the wiles of the white man.

Cantwell approached her, and she met his extravagant advances more than half-way. They were getting along nicely together when Grant, in a spirit of fun, entered the game and won her fickle smiles for himself. He joked his partner unmercifully, and Johnny accepted defeat gracefully, never giving the matter a second thought.

When the hunters returned, dogs were bought, a guide was hired, and, a week after landing, the friends were camped at timber-line awaiting a favorable moment for their dash across the range. Above them white hillsides rose in irregular leaps to the gash in the saw-toothed barrier which formed the pass; below them a short valley led down to Katmai and the sea. The day was bright, the air clear, nevertheless after the guide had stared up at the peaks for a time he shook his head, then re-entered the tent and lay down. The mountains were "smoking"; from their tops streamed a gossamer veil which the travelers knew to be drifting snow-clouds carried by the wind. It meant delay, but they were patient.

They were up and going on the following morning, however, with the Indian in the lead. There was no trail; the hills were steep; in places they were forced to unload the sled and hoist their outfit by means of ropes, and as they mounted higher the snow deepened. It lay like loose sand, only lighter; it shoved ahead of the sled in a feathery mass; the dogs wallowed in it and were unable to pull, hence the greater part of the work devolved upon the men. Once above the foot-hills and into the range proper, the going became more level, but the snow remained knee-deep.

The Indian broke trail stolidly; the partners strained at the sled, which hung back like a leaden thing. By afternoon the dogs had become disheartened and refused to heed the whip. There was neither fuel nor running water, and therefore the party did not pause for luncheon. The men were sweating profusely from their exertions and had long since become parched with thirst, but the dry snow was like chalk and scoured their throats.

Cantwell was the first to show the effects of his unusual exertions, for not only had he assumed a lion's share of the work, but the last few months of easy living had softened his muscles, and in consequence his vitality was quickly spent. His undergarments were drenched; he was fearfully dry inside; a terrible thirst seemed to penetrate his whole body; he was forced to rest frequently.

Grant eyed him with some concern, finally inquiring, "Feel bad, Johnny?"

Cantwell nodded. Their fatigue made both men economical of language.

"What's the matter?"

"Thirsty!" The former could barely speak.

"There won't be any water till we get across. You'll have to stand it."

They resumed their duties; the Indian "swish-swished" ahead, as if wading through a sea of swan's-down; the dogs followed listlessly; the partners leaned against the stubborn load.

A faint breath finally came out of the north, causing Grant and the guide to study the sky anxiously. Cantwell was too weary to heed the increasing cold. The snow on the slopes above began to move; here and there, on exposed ridges, it rose in clouds and puffs; the clean-cut outlines of the hills became obscured as by a fog; the languid wind bit cruelly.

After a time Johnny fell back upon the sled and exclaimed: "I'm--all in, Mort. Don't seem to have the--guts." He was pale, his eyes were tortured. He scooped a mitten full of snow and raised it to his lips, then spat it out, still dry.

"Here! Brace up!" In a panic of apprehension at this collapse Grant shook him; he had never known Johnny to fail like this. "Take a drink of booze; it'll do you good." He drew a bottle of brandy from one of the dunnage bags and Cantwell seized it avidly. It was wet; it would quench his thirst, he thought. Before Mort could check him he had drunk a third of the contents.

The effect was almost instantaneous, for Cantwell's stomach was empty and his tissues seemed to absorb the liquor like a dry sponge; his fatigue fell away, he became suddenly strong and vigorous again. But before he had gone a hundred yards the reaction followed. First his mind grew thick, then his limbs became unmanageable and his muscles flabby. He was drunk. Yet it was a strange and dangerous intoxication, against which he struggled desperately. He fought it for perhaps a quarter of a mile before it mastered him; then he gave up.

Both men knew that stimulants are never taken on the trail, but they had never stopped to reason why, and even now they did not attribute Johnny's breakdown to the brandy. After a while he stumbled and fell, then, the cool snow being grateful to his face, he sprawled there motionless until Mort dragged him to the sled. He stared at his partner in perplexity and laughed foolishly. The wind was increasing, darkness was near, they had not yet reached the Bering slope.

Something in the drunken man's face frightened Grant and, extracting a ship's biscuit from the grub-box, he said, hurriedly: "Here, Johnny. Get something under your belt, quick."

Cantwell obediently munched the hard cracker, but there was no moisture

on his tongue; his throat was paralyzed; the crumbs crowded themselves from the corners of his lips. He tried with limber fingers to stuff them down, or to assist the muscular action of swallowing, but finally expelled them in a cloud. Mort drew the parka hood over his partner's head, for the wind cut like a scythe and the dogs were turning tail to it, digging holes in the snow for protection. The air about them was like yeast; the light was fading.

The Indian snow-shoed his way back, advising a quick camp until the storm abated, but to this suggestion Grant refused to listen, knowing only too well the peril of such a course. Nor did he dare take Johnny on the sled, since the fellow was half asleep already, but instead whipped up the dogs and urged his companion to follow as best he could.

When Cantwell fell, for a second time, he returned, dragged him forward, and tied his wrists firmly, yet loosely, to the load.

The storm was pouring over them now, like water out of a spout; it seared and blinded them; its touch was like that of a flame. Nevertheless they struggled on into the smother, making what headway they could. The Indian led, pulling at the end of a rope; Grant strained at the sled and hoarsely encouraged the dogs; Cantwell stumbled and lurched in the rear like an unwilling prisoner. When he fell his companion lifted him, then beat him, cursed him, tried in every way to rouse him from his lethargy.

After an interminable time they found they were descending and this gave them heart to plunge ahead more rapidly. The dogs began to trot as the sled overran them; they rushed blindly into gullies, fetching up at the bottom in a tangle, and Johnny followed in a nerveless, stupefied condition. He was dragged like a sack of flour, for his legs were limp and he lacked muscular control, but every dash, every fall, every quick descent drove the sluggish blood through his veins and cleared his brain momentarily. Such moments were fleeting, however; much of the time his mind was a blank, and it was only by a mechanical effort that he fought off unconsciousness.

He had vague memories of many beatings at Mort's hands, of the slippery clean-swept ice of a stream over which he limply skidded, of being carried into a tent where a candle flickered and a stove roared. Grant was holding something hot to his lips, and then--

It was morning. He was weak and sick; he felt as if he had awakened from a hideous dream. "I played out, didn't I?" he queried, wonderingly.

"You sure did," Grant laughed. "It was a tight squeak, old boy. I never thought I'd get you through."

"Played out! I--can't understand it." Cantwell prided himself on his

strength and stamina, therefore the truth was unbelievable. He and Mort had long been partners, they had given and taken much at each other's hands, but this was something altogether different. Grant had saved his life, at risk of his own; the older man's endurance had been the greater and he had used it to good advantage. It embarrassed Johnny tremendously to realize that he had proven unequal to his share of the work, for he had never before experienced such an obligation. He apologized repeatedly during the few days he lay sick, and meanwhile Mort waited upon him like a mother.

Cantwell was relieved when at last they had abandoned camp, changed guides at the next village, and were on their way along the coast, for somehow he felt very sensitive about his collapse. He was, in fact, extremely ashamed of himself.

Once he had fully recovered he had no further trouble, but soon rounded into fit condition and showed no effects of his ordeal. Day after day he and Mort traveled through the solitudes, their isolation broken only by occasional glimpses of native villages, where they rested briefly and renewed their supply of dog-feed.

But although the younger man was now as well and strong as ever, he was uncomfortably conscious that his trail-mate regarded him as the weaker of the two and shielded him in many ways. Grant performed most of the unpleasant tasks, and occasionally cautioned Johnny about overdoing. This protective attitude at first amused, then offended Cantwell; it galled him until he was upon the point of voicing his resentment, but reflected that he had no right to object, for, judging by past performances, he had proved his inferiority. This uncomfortable realization forever arose to prevent open rebellion, but he asserted himself secretly by robbing Grant of his self-appointed tasks. He rose first in the mornings, he did the cooking, he lengthened his turns ahead of the dogs, he mended harness after the day's hike had ended. Of course the older man objected, and for a time they had a good-natured rivalry as to who should work and who should rest--only it was not quite so good-natured on Cantwell's part as he made it appear.

Mort broke out in friendly irritation one day: "Don't try to do everything, Johnny. Remember I'm no cripple."

"Humph! You proved that. I guess it's up to me to do your work."

"Oh, forget that day on the pass, can't you?"

Johnny grunted a second time, and from his tone it was evident that he would never forget, unpleasant though the memory remained. Sensing his sullen resentment, the other tried to rally him, but made a bad job of it. The humor of men in the open is not delicate; their wit and their words become coarsened in direct proportion as they revert to the

primitive; it is one effect of the solitudes.

Grant spoke extravagantly, mockingly, of his own superiority in a way which ordinarily would have brought a smile to Cantwell's lips, but the latter did not smile. He taunted Johnny humorously on his lack of physical prowess, his lack of good looks and manly qualities--something which had never failed to result in a friendly exchange of badinage; he even teased him about his defeat with the Katmai girl.

Cantwell did respond finally, but afterward he found himself wondering if Mort could have been in earnest. He dismissed the thought with some impatience. But men on the trail have too much time for their thoughts; there is nothing in the monotonous routine of the day's work to distract them, so the partner who had played out dwelt more and more upon his debt and upon his friend's easy assumption of pre-eminence. The weight of obligation began to chafe him, lightly at first, but with ever-increasing discomfort. He began to think that Grant honestly considered himself the better man, merely because chance had played into his hands.

It was silly, even childish, to dwell on the subject, he reflected, and yet he could not banish it from his mind. It was always before him, in one form or another. He felt the strength in his lean muscles, and sneered at the thought that Mort should be deceived. If it came to a physical test he felt sure he could break his slighter partner with his bare hands, and as for endurance--well, he was hungry for a chance to demonstrate it.

They talked little; men seldom converse in the wastes, for there is something about the silence of the wilderness which discourages speech. And no land is so grimly silent, so hushed and soundless, as the frozen North. For days they marched through desolation, without glimpse of human habitation, without sight of track or trail, without sound of a human voice to break the monotony. There was no game in the country, with the exception of an occasional bird or rabbit, nothing but the white hills, the fringe of alder-tops along the watercourses, and the thickets of gnarled, unhealthy spruce in the smothered valleys.

Their destination was a mysterious stream at the headwaters of the unmapped Kuskokwim, where rumor said there was gold, and whither they feared other men were hastening from the mining country far to the north.

Now it is a penalty of the White Country that men shall think of women. The open life brings health and vigor, strength and animal vitality, and these clamor for play. The cold of the still, clear days is no more biting than the fierce memories and appetites which charge through the brain at night. Passions intensify with imprisonment, recollections come to life, longings grow vivid and wild. Thoughts change to realities, the

past creeps close, and dream figures are filled with blood and fire. One remembers pleasures and excesses, women's smiles, women's kisses, the invitation of outstretched arms. Wasted opportunities mock at one.

Cantwell began to brood upon the Katmai girl, for she was the last; her eyes were haunting and distance had worked its usual enchantment. He reflected that Mort had shouldered him aside and won her favor, then boasted of it. Johnny awoke one night with a dream of her, and lay quivering.

"Hell! She was only a squaw," he said, half aloud. "If I'd really tried--"

Grant lay beside him, snoring, the heat of their bodies intermingled. The waking man tried to compose himself, but his partner's stertorous breathing irritated him beyond measure; for a long time he remained motionless, staring into the gray blur of the tent-top. He had played out. He owed his life to the man who had cheated him of the Katmai girl, and that man knew it. He had become a weak, helpless thing, dependent upon another's strength, and that other now accepted his superiority as a matter of course. The obligation was insufferable, and--it was unjust. The North had played him a devilish trick, it had betrayed him, it had bound him to his benefactor with chains of gratitude which were irksome. Had they been real chains they could have galled him no more than at this moment.

As time passed the men spoke less frequently to each other. Grant joshed his mate roughly, once or twice, masking beneath an assumption of jocularly his own vague irritation at the change that had come over them. It was as if he had probed at an open wound with clumsy fingers.

Cantwell had by this time assumed most of those petty camp tasks which provoke tired trailers, those humdrum duties which are so trying to exhausted nerves, and of course they wore upon him as they wear upon every man. But, once he had taken them over, he began to resent Grant's easy relinquishment; it rankled him to realize how willingly the other allowed him to do the cooking, the dish-washing, the fire-building, the bed-making. Little monotonies of this kind form the hardest part of winter travel, they are the rocks upon which friendships founder and partnerships are wrecked. Out on the trail, nature equalizes the work to a great extent, and no man can shirk unduly, but in camp, inside the cramped confines of a tent pitched on boughs laid over the snow, it is very different. There one must busy himself while the other rests and keeps his legs out of the way if possible. One man sits on the bedding at the rear of the shelter, and shivers, while the other squats over a tantalizing fire of green wood, blistering his face and parboiling his limbs inside his sweaty clothing. Dishes must be passed, food divided, and it is poor food, poorly prepared at best. Sometimes men criticize and voice longings for better grub and better cooking. Remarks of this

kind have been known to result in tragedies, bitter words and flaming curses--then, perhaps, wild actions, memories of which the later years can never erase.

It is but one prank of the wilderness, one grim manifestation of its silent forces.

Had Grant been unable to do his part Cantwell would have willingly accepted the added burden, but Mort was able, he was nimble and "handy," he was the better cook of the two; in fact, he was the better man in every way--or so he believed. Cantwell sneered at the last thought, and the memory of his debt was like bitter medicine.

His resentment--in reality nothing more than a phase of insanity begot of isolation and silence--could not help but communicate itself to his companion, and there resulted a mutual antagonism, which grew into a dislike, then festered into something more, something strange, reasonless, yet terribly vivid and amazingly potent for evil. Neither man ever mentioned it--their tongues were clenched between their teeth and they held themselves in check with harsh hands--but it was constantly in their minds, nevertheless. No man who has not suffered the manifold irritations of such an intimate association can appreciate the gnawing canker of animosity like this. It was dangerous because there was no relief from it: the two were bound together as by gyves; they shared each other's every action and every plan; they trod in each other's tracks, slept in the same bed, ate from the same plate. They were like prisoners ironed to the same staple.

Each fought the obsession in his own way, but it is hard to fight the impalpable, hence their sick fancies grew in spite of themselves. Their minds needed food to prey upon, but found none. Each began to criticize the other silently, to sneer at his weaknesses, to meditate derisively upon his peculiarities. After a time they no longer resisted the advance of these poisonous thoughts, but welcomed it.

On more than one occasion the embers of their wrath were upon the point of bursting into flame, but each realized that the first ill-considered word would serve to slip the leash from those demons that were straining to go free, and so managed to restrain himself.

The crisis came one crisp morning when a dog-team whirled around a bend in the river and a white man hailed them. He was the mail-carrier, on his way out from Nome, and he brought news of the "inside."

"Where are you boys bound for?" he inquired when greetings were over and gossip of the trail had passed.

"We're going to the Stony River strike," Grant told him.

"Stony River? Up the Kuskokwim?"

"Yes!"

The mail-man laughed. "Can you beat that? Ain't you heard about Stony River?"

"No!"

"Why, it's a fake--no such place."

There was a silence; the partners avoided each other's eyes.

"MacDonald, the fellow that started it, is on his way to Dawson. There's a gang after him, too, and if he's caught it'll go hard with him. He wrote the letters--to himself--and spread the news just to raise a grub-stake. He cleaned up big before they got onto him. He peddled his tips for real money."

"Yes!" Grant spoke quietly. "Johnny bought one. That's what brought us from Seattle. We went out on the last boat and figured we'd come in from this side before the break-up. So--fake! By God!"

"Gee! You fellers bit good." The mail-carrier shook his head. "Well! You'd better keep going now; you'll get to Nome before the season opens. Better take dog-fish from Bethel--it's four bits a pound on the Yukon. Sorry I didn't hit your camp last night; we'd 'a' had a visit. Tell the gang that you saw me." He shook hands ceremoniously, yelled at his panting dogs, and went swiftly on his way, waving a mitten on high as he vanished around the next bend.

The partners watched him go, then Grant turned to Johnny, and repeated: "Fake! By God! MacDonald stung you."

Cantwell's face went as white as the snow behind him, his eyes blazed. "Why did you tell him I bit?" he demanded, harshly.

"Hunh! _Didn't_ you bite? Two thousand miles afoot; three months of hell; for nothing. That's biting some."

"_Well!_" The speaker's face was convulsed, and Grant's flamed with an answering anger. They glared at each other for a moment. "Don't blame me. You fell for it, too."

"I--" Mort checked his rushing words.

"Yes, _you_! Now, what are you going to do about it? Welch?"

"I'm going through to Nome." The sight of his partner's rage had set

Mort to shaking with a furious desire to fly at his throat, but, fortunately, he retained a spark of sanity.

"Then shut up, and quit chewing the rag. You--talk too damned much."

Mort's eyes were bloodshot; they fell upon the carbine under the sled lashings, and lingered there, then wavered. He opened his lips, reconsidered, spoke softly to the team, then lifted the heavy dog-whip and smote the malamutes with all his strength.

The men resumed their journey without further words, but each was cursing inwardly.

"So! I talk too much," Grant thought. The accusation struck in his mind and he determined to speak no more.

"He blames me," Cantwell reflected, bitterly. "I'm in wrong again and he couldn't keep his mouth shut. A hell of a partner, he is!"

All day they plodded on, neither trusting himself to speak. They ate their evening meal like mutes; they avoided each other's eyes. Even the guide noticed the change and looked on curiously.

There were two robes and these the partners shared nightly, but their hatred had grown so during the past few hours that the thought of lying side by side, limb to limb, was distasteful. Yet neither dared suggest a division of the bedding, for that would have brought further words and resulted in the crash which they longed for, but feared. They stripped off their furs, and lay down beside each other with the same repugnance they would have felt had there been a serpent in the couch.

This unending malevolent silence became terrible. The strain of it increased, for each man now had something definite to cherish in the words and the looks that had passed. They divided the camp work with scrupulous nicety, each man waited upon himself and asked no favors. The knowledge of his debt forever chafed Cantwell; Grant resented his companion's lack of gratitude.

Of course they spoke occasionally--it was beyond human endurance to remain entirely dumb--but they conversed in monosyllables, about trivial things, and their voices were throaty, as if the effort choked them. Meanwhile they continued to glow inwardly at a white heat.

Cantwell no longer felt the desire to merely match his strength against Grant's; the estrangement had become too wide for that; a physical victory would have been flat and tasteless; he craved some deeper satisfaction. He began to think of the ax--just how or when or why he never knew. It was a thin-bladed, polished thing of frosty steel, and the more he thought of it the stronger grew his impulse to rid himself

once for all of that presence which exasperated him. It would be very easy, he reasoned; a sudden blow, with the weight of his shoulders behind it--he fancied he could feel the bit sink into Grant's flesh, cleaving bone and cartilages in its course--a slanting downward stroke, aimed at the neck where it joined the body, and he would be forever satisfied. It would be ridiculously simple. He practised in the gloom of evening as he felled spruce-trees for fire-wood; he guarded the ax religiously; it became a living thing which urged him on to violence. He saw it standing by the tent-fly when he closed his eyes to sleep; he dreamed of it; he sought it out with his eyes when he first awoke. He slid it loosely under the sled lashings every morning, thinking that its use could not long be delayed.

As for Grant, the carbine dwelt forever in his mind, and his fingers itched for it. He secretly slipped a cartridge into the chamber, and when an occasional ptarmigan offered itself for a target he saw the white spot on the breast of Johnny's reindeer parka, dancing ahead of the Lyman bead.

The solitude had done its work; the North had played its grim comedy to the final curtain, making sport of men's affections and turning love to rankling hate. But into the mind of each man crept a certain craftiness. Each longed to strike, but feared to face the consequences. It was lonesome, here among the white hills and the deathly silences, yet they reflected that it would be still more lonesome if they were left to keep step with nothing more substantial than a memory. They determined, therefore, to wait until civilization was nearer, meanwhile rehearsing the moment they knew was inevitable. Over and over in their thoughts each of them enacted the scene, ending it always with the picture of a prostrate man in a patch of trampled snow which grew crimson as the other gloated.

They paused at Bethel Mission long enough to load with dried salmon, then made the ninety-mile portage over lake and tundra to the Yukon. There they got their first touch of the "inside" world. They camped in a barabara where white men had slept a few nights before, and heard their own language spoken by native tongues. The time was growing short now, and they purposely dismissed their guide, knowing that the trail was plain from there on. When they hitched up, on the next morning, Cantwell placed the ax, bit down, between the tarpaulin and the sled rail, leaving the helve projecting where his hand could reach it. Grant thrust the barrel of the rifle beneath a lashing, with the butt close by the handle-bars, and it was loaded.

A mile from the village they were overtaken by an Indian and his squaw, traveling light behind hungry dogs. The natives attached themselves to the white men and hung stubbornly to their heels, taking advantage of their tracks. When night came they camped alongside, in the hope of food. They announced that they were bound for St. Michaels, and in spite

of every effort to shake them off they remained close behind the partners until that point was reached.

At St. Michaels there were white men, practically the first Johnny and Mort had encountered since landing at Katmai, and for a day at least they were sane. But there were still three hundred miles to be traveled, three hundred miles of solitude and haunting thoughts. Just as they were about to start, Cantwell came upon Grant and the A. C. agent, and heard his name pronounced, also the word "Katmai." He noted that Mort fell silent at his approach, and instantly his anger blazed afresh. He decided that the latter had been telling the story of their experience on the pass and boasting of his service. So much the better, he thought, in a blind rage; that which he planned doing would appear all the more like an accident, for who would dream that a man could kill the person to whom he owed his life?

That night he waited for a chance.

They were camped in a dismal hut on a wind-swept shore; they were alone. But Grant was waiting also, it seemed. They lay down beside each other, ostensibly to sleep; their limbs touched; the warmth from their bodies intermingled, but they did not close their eyes.

They were up and away early, with Nome drawing rapidly nearer. They had skirted an ocean, foot by foot; Bering Sea lay behind them, now, and its northern shore swung westward to their goal. For two months they had lived in silent animosity, feeding on bitter food while their elbows rubbed.

Noon found them floundering through one of those unheralded storms which make coast travel so hazardous. The morning had turned off gray, the sky was of a leaden hue which blended perfectly with the snow underfoot, there was no horizon, it was impossible to see more than a few yards in any direction. The trail soon became obliterated and their eyes began to play tricks. For all they could distinguish, they might have been suspended in space; they seemed to be treading the measures of an endless dance in the center of a whirling cloud. Of course it was cold, for the wind off the open sea was damp, but they were not men to turn back.

They soon discovered that their difficulty lay not in facing the storm, but in holding to the trail. That narrow, two-foot causeway, packed by a winter's travel and frozen into a ribbon of ice by a winter's frosts, afforded their only avenue of progress, for the moment they left it the sled plowed into the loose snow, well-nigh disappearing and bringing the dogs to a standstill. It was the duty of the driver, in such case, to wallow forward, right the load if necessary, and lift it back into place. These mishaps were forever occurring, for it was impossible to distinguish the trail beneath its soft covering. However, if the

driver's task was hard it was no more trying than that of the man ahead, who was compelled to feel out and explore the ridge of hardened snow and ice with his feet, after the fashion of a man walking a plank in the dark. Frequently he lunged into the drifts with one foot, or both; his glazed mukluk soles slid about, causing him to bestride the invisible hog-back, or again his legs crossed awkwardly, throwing him off his balance. At times he wandered away from the path entirely and had to search it out again. These exertions were very wearing and they were dangerous, also, for joints are easily dislocated, muscles twisted, and tendons strained.

Hour after hour the march continued, unrelieved by any change, unbroken by any speck or spot of color. The nerves of their eyes, wearied by constant near-sighted peering at the snow, began to jump so that vision became untrustworthy. Both travelers appreciated the necessity of clinging to the trail, for, once they lost it, they knew they might wander about indefinitely until they chanced to regain it or found their way to the shore, while always to seaward was the menace of open water, of air-holes, or cracks which might gape beneath their feet like jaws. Immersion in this temperature, no matter how brief, meant death.

The monotony of progress through this unreal, leaden world became almost unbearable. The repeated strainings and twistings they suffered in walking the slippery ridge reduced the men to weariness; their legs grew clumsy and their feet uncertain. Had they found a camping-place they would have stopped, but they dared not forsake the thin thread that linked them with safety to go and look for one, not knowing where the shore lay. In storms of this kind men have lain in their sleeping-bags for days within a stone's-throw of a roadhouse or village. Bodies have been found within a hundred yards of shelter after blizzards have abated.

Cantwell and Grant had no choice, therefore, except to bore into the welter of drifting flakes.

It was late in the afternoon when the latter met with an accident. Johnny, who had taken a spell at the rear, heard him cry out, saw him stagger, struggle to hold his footing, then sink into the snow. The dogs paused instantly, lay down, and began to strip the ice pellets from between their toes.

Cantwell spoke harshly, leaning upon the handle-bars: "Well! What's the idea?"

It was the longest sentence of the day.

"I've--hurt myself." Mort's voice was thin and strange; he raised himself to a sitting posture, and reached beneath his parka, then lay back weakly. He writhed, his face was twisted with pain. He continued to

lie there, doubled into a knot of suffering. A groan was wrenched from between his teeth.

"Hurt? How?" Johnny inquired, dully.

It seemed very ridiculous to see that strong man kicking around in the snow.

"I've ripped something loose--here." Mort's palms were pressed in upon his groin, his fingers were clutching something. "Ruptured--I guess." He tried again to rise, but sank back. His cap had fallen off and his forehead glistened with sweat.

Cantwell went forward and lifted him. It was the first time in many days that their hands had touched, and the sensation affected him strangely. He struggled to repress a devilish mirth at the thought that Grant had played out--it amounted to that and nothing less; the trail had delivered him into his enemy's hands, his hour had struck. Johnny determined to square the debt now, once for all, and wipe his own mind clean of that poison which corroded it. His muscles were strong, his brain clear, he had never felt his strength so irresistible as at this moment, while Mort, for all his boasted superiority, was nothing but a nerveless thing hanging limp against his breast. Providence had arranged it all. The younger man was impelled to give raucous voice to his glee, and yet--his helpless burden exerted an odd effect upon him.

He deposited his foe upon the sled and stared at the face he had not met for many days. He saw how white it was, how wet and cold, how weak and dazed, then as he looked he cursed inwardly, for the triumph of his moment was spoiled.

The ax was there, its polished bit showed like a piece of ice, its helve protruded handily, but there was no need of it now; his fingers were all the weapons Johnny needed; they were more than sufficient, in fact, for Mort was like a child.

Cantwell was a strong man, and, although the North had coarsened him, yet underneath the surface was a chivalrous regard for all things weak, and this the trail-madness had not affected. He had longed for this instant, but now that it had come he felt no enjoyment, since he could not harm a sick man and waged no war on cripples. Perhaps, when Mort had rested, they could settle their quarrel; this was as good a place as any. The storm hid them, they would leave no traces, there could be no interruption.

But Mort did not rest. He could not walk; movement brought excruciating pain.

Finally Cantwell heard himself saying: "Better wrap up and lie still for

a while. I'll get the dogs underway." His words amazed him dully. They were not at all what he had intended to say.

The injured man demurred, but the other insisted gruffly, then brought him his mittens and cap, slapping the snow out of them before rousing the team to motion. The load was very heavy now, the dogs had no footprints to guide them, and it required all of Cantwell's efforts to prevent capsizing. Night approached swiftly, the whirling snow particles continued to flow past upon the wind, shrouding the earth in an impenetrable pall.

The journey soon became a terrible ordeal, a slow, halting progress that led nowhere and was accomplished at the cost of tremendous exertion. Time after time Johnny broke trail, then returned and urged the huskies forward to the end of his tracks. When he lost the path he sought it out, laboriously hoisted the sledge back into place, and coaxed his four-footed helpers to renewed effort. He was drenched with perspiration, his inner garments were steaming, his outer ones were frozen into a coat of armor; when he paused he chilled rapidly. His vision was untrustworthy, also, and he felt snow-blindness coming on. Grant begged him more than once to unroll the bedding and prepare to sleep out the storm; he even urged Johnny to leave him and make a dash for his own safety, but at this the younger man cursed and told him to hold his tongue.

Night found the lone driver slipping, plunging, lurching ahead of the dogs, or shoving at the handle-bars and shouting at the dogs. Finally, during a pause for rest he heard a sound which roused him. Out of the gloom to the right came the faint, complaining howl of a malamute; it was answered by his own dogs, and the next moment they had caught a scent which swerved them shoreward and led them scrambling through the drifts. Two hundred yards, and a steep bank loomed above, up and over which they rushed, with Cantwell yelling encouragement; then a light showed, and they were in the lee of a low-roofed hut.

A sick native, huddled over a Yukon stove, made them welcome to his mean abode, explaining that his wife and son had gone to Unalaklik for supplies.

Johnny carried his partner to the one unoccupied bunk and stripped his clothes from him. With his own hands he rubbed the warmth back into Mortimer's limbs, then swiftly prepared hot food, and, holding him in the hollow of his aching arm, fed him, a little at a time. He was like to drop from exhaustion, but he made no complaint. With one folded robe he made the hard boards comfortable, then spread the other as a covering. For himself he sat beside the fire and fought his weariness. When he dozed off and the cold awakened him, he renewed the fire; he heated beef-tea, and, rousing Mort, fed it to him with a teaspoon. All night long, at intervals, he tended the sick man, and Grant's eyes

followed him with an expression that brought a fierce pain to Cantwell's throat.

"You're mighty good--after the rotten way I acted," the former whispered once.

And Johnny's big hand trembled so that he spilled the broth.

His voice was low and tender as he inquired, "Are you resting easier now?"

The other nodded.

"Maybe you're not hurt badly, after--all. God! That would be awful--" Cantwell choked, turned away, and, raising his arms against the log wall, buried his face in them.

* * * * *

The morning broke clear; Grant was sleeping. As Johnny stiffly mounted the creek bank with a bucket of water he heard a jingle of sleigh-bells and saw a sled with two white men swing in toward the cabin.

"Hello!" he called, then heard his own name pronounced.

"Johnny Cantwell, by all that's holy!"

The next moment he was shaking hands vigorously with two old friends from Nome.

"Martin and me are bound for Saint Mikes," one of them explained. "Where the deuce did you come from, Johnny?"

"The 'outside.' Started for Stony River, but--"

"Stony River!" The new-comers began to laugh loudly and Cantwell joined them. It was the first time he had laughed for weeks. He realized the fact with a start, then recollected also his sleeping partner, and said:

"Sh-h! Mort's inside, asleep!"

During the night everything had changed for Johnny Cantwell; his mental attitude, his hatred, his whole reasonless insanity. Everything was different now, even his debt was canceled, the weight of obligation was removed, and his diseased fancies were completely cured.

"Yes! Stony River," he repeated, grinning broadly. "I bit!"

Martin burst forth, gleefully: "They caught MacDonald at Holy Cross and

ran him out on a limb. He'll never start another stampede. Old man Baker gun-branded him."

"What's the matter with Mort?" inquired the second traveler.

"He's resting up. Yesterday, during the storm he--" Johnny was upon the point of saying "played out," but changed it to "had an accident. We thought it was serious, but a few days' rest 'll bring him around all right. He saved me at Katmai, coming in. I petered out and threw up my tail, but he got me through. Come inside and tell him the news."

"Sure thing."

"Well, well!" Martin said. "So you and Mort are still partners, eh?"

"_Still_ partners?" Johnny took up the pail of water. "Well, rather! We'll always be partners." His voice was young and full and hearty as he continued: "Why, Mort's the best damned fellow in the world. I'd lay down my life for him."

THE MISSION OF JANE

from: Project Gutenberg's *The Descent of Man and Other Stories*, by Edith Wharton

I

LETHBURY, surveying his wife across the dinner table, found his transient conjugal glance arrested by an indefinable change in her appearance.

"How smart you look! Is that a new gown?" he asked.

Her answering look seemed to deprecate his charging her with the extravagance of wasting a new gown on him, and he now perceived that the change lay deeper than any accident of dress. At the same time, he noticed that she betrayed her consciousness of it by a delicate, almost frightened blush. It was one of the compensations of Mrs. Lethbury's protracted childishness that she still blushed as prettily as at eighteen. Her body had been privileged not to outstrip her mind, and the two, as it seemed to Lethbury, were destined to travel together through an eternity of girlishness.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

Since she never did, he always wondered at her bringing this out as a fresh grievance against him; but his wonder was unresentful, and he said good-humoredly: "You sparkle so that I thought you had on your diamonds."

She sighed and blushed again.

"It must be," he continued, "that you've been to a dressmaker's opening. You're absolutely brimming with illicit enjoyment."

She stared again, this time at the adjective. His adjectives always embarrassed her: their unintelligibleness savored of impropriety.

"In short," he summed up, "you've been doing something that you're thoroughly ashamed of."

To his surprise she retorted: "I don't see why I should be ashamed of it!"

Lethbury leaned back with a smile of enjoyment. When there was nothing better going he always liked to listen to her explanations.

"Well--?" he said.

She was becoming breathless and ejaculatory. "Of course you'll laugh--you laugh at everything!"

"That rather blunts the point of my derision, doesn't it?" he interjected; but she rushed on without noticing:

"It's so easy to laugh at things."

"Ah," murmured Lethbury with relish, "that's Aunt Sophronia's, isn't it?"

Most of his wife's opinions were heirlooms, and he took a quaint pleasure in tracing their descent. She was proud of their age, and saw no reason for discarding them while they were still serviceable. Some, of course, were so fine that she kept them for state occasions, like her great-grandmother's Crown Derby; but from the lady known as Aunt Sophronia she had inherited a stout set of every-day prejudices that were practically as good as new; whereas her husband's, as she noticed, were always having to be replaced. In the early days she had fancied there might be a certain satisfaction in taxing him with the fact; but she had long since been silenced by the reply: "My dear, I'm not a rich man, but I never use an opinion twice if I can help it."

She was reduced, therefore, to dwelling on his moral deficiencies; and one of the most obvious of these was his refusal to take things seriously. On this occasion, however, some ulterior purpose kept her from taking up his taunt.

"I'm not in the least ashamed!" she repeated, with the air of shaking a banner to the wind; but the domestic atmosphere being calm, the banner drooped unheroically.

"That," said Lethbury judicially, "encourages me to infer that you ought to be, and that, consequently, you've been giving yourself the unusual pleasure of doing something I shouldn't approve of."

She met this with an almost solemn directness. "No," she said. "You won't approve of it. I've allowed for that."

"Ah," he exclaimed, setting down his liqueur-glass. "You've worked out the whole problem, eh?"

"I believe so."

"That's uncommonly interesting. And what is it?"

She looked at him quietly. "A baby."

If it was seldom given her to surprise him, she had attained the distinction for once.

"A baby?"

"Yes."

"A--human baby?"

"Of course!" she cried, with the virtuous resentment of the woman who has never allowed dogs in the house.

Lethbury's puzzled stare broke into a fresh smile. "A baby I sha'n't approve of? Well, in the abstract I don't think much of them, I admit. Is this an abstract baby?"

Again she frowned at the adjective; but she had reached a pitch of exaltation at which such obstacles could not deter her.

"It's the loveliest baby--" she murmured.

"Ah, then it's concrete. It exists. In this harsh world it draws its breath in pain--"

"It's the healthiest child I ever saw!" she indignantly corrected.

"You've seen it, then?"

Again the accusing blush suffused her. "Yes--I've seen it."

"And to whom does the paragon belong?"

And here indeed she confounded him. "To me--I hope," she declared.

He pushed his chair back with an inarticulate murmur. "To _you_--?"

"To _us_," she corrected.

"Good Lord!" he said. If there had been the least hint of hallucination in her transparent gaze--but no: it was as clear, as shallow, as easily fathomable as when he had first suffered the sharp surprise of striking bottom in it.

It occurred to him that perhaps she was trying to be funny: he knew that there is nothing more cryptic than the humor of the unhumorous.

"Is it a joke?" he faltered.

"Oh, I hope not. I want it so much to be a reality--"

He paused to smile at the limitations of a world in which jokes were not realities, and continued gently: "But since it is one already--"

"To us, I mean: to you and me. I want--" her voice wavered, and her eyes with it. "I have always wanted so dreadfully...it has been such a disappointment...not to..."

"I see," said Lethbury slowly.

But he had not seen before. It seemed curious, now, that he had never thought of her taking it in that way, had never surmised any hidden depths beneath her outspread obviousness. He felt as though he had touched a secret spring in her mind.

There was a moment's silence, moist and tremulous on her part, awkward and slightly irritated on his.

"You've been lonely, I suppose?" he began. It was odd, having suddenly to reckon with the stranger who gazed at him out of her trivial eyes.

"At times," she said.

"I'm sorry."

"It was not your fault. A man has so many occupations; and women who are clever--or very handsome--I suppose that's an occupation too. Sometimes I've felt that when dinner was ordered I had nothing to do till the next day."

"Oh," he groaned.

"It wasn't your fault," she insisted. "I never told you--but when I chose that rose-bud paper for the front room upstairs, I always thought--"

"Well--?"

"It would be such a pretty paper--for a baby--to wake up in. That was years ago, of course; but it was rather an expensive paper... and it hasn't faded in the least..." she broke off incoherently.

"It hasn't faded?"

"No--and so I thought...as we don't use the room for anything ... now that Aunt Sophronia is dead...I thought I might... you might...oh, Julian, if you could only have seen it just waking up in its crib!"

"Seen what--where? You haven't got a baby upstairs?"

"Oh, no--not _yet_," she said, with her rare laugh--the girlish bubbling of merriment that had seemed one of her chief graces in the early days. It occurred to him that he had not given her enough things to laugh about lately. But then she needed such very elementary things: it was as difficult to amuse her as a savage. He concluded that he was not sufficiently simple.

"Alice," he said, almost solemnly, "what _do_ you mean?"

She hesitated a moment: he saw her gather her courage for a supreme effort. Then she said slowly, gravely, as though she were pronouncing a sacramental phrase:

"I'm so lonely without a little child--and I thought perhaps you'd let me adopt one....It's at the hospital...its mother is dead...and I could...pet it, and dress it, and do things for it...and it's such a good baby...you can ask any of the nurses...it would never, _never_ bother you by crying..."

II

Lethbury accompanied his wife to the hospital in a mood of chastened wonder. It did not occur to him to oppose her wish. He knew, of course, that he would have to bear the brunt of the situation: the jokes at the club, the inquiries, the explanations. He saw himself in the comic role of the adopted father, and welcomed it as an expiation. For in his rapid reconstruction of the past he found himself cutting a shabbier figure than he cared to admit. He had always been intolerant of stupid people, and it was his punishment to be convicted of stupidity. As his mind traversed the years between his marriage and this unexpected assumption of paternity, he saw, in the light of an overheated imagination, many signs of unwonted crassness. It was not that he had ceased to think his wife stupid: she _was_ stupid, limited, inflexible; but there was a pathos in the struggles of her swaddled mind, in its blind reachings toward the primal emotions. He had always thought she would have been happier with a child; but he had thought it mechanically, because it had so often been thought before, because it was in the nature of things to think it of every woman, because his wife was so eminently one of a species that she fitted into all the generalizations on the sex. But he had regarded this generalization as merely typical of the triumph of tradition over experience. Maternity was no doubt the supreme function of primitive woman, the one end to which her whole organism tended; but the law of increasing complexity had operated in both sexes, and he had not seriously supposed that, outside the world of Christmas fiction and anecdotic art, such truisms had any special hold on the feminine imagination. Now he saw that the

arts in question were kept alive by the vitality of the sentiments they appealed to.

Lethbury was in fact going through a rapid process of readjustment. His marriage had been a failure, but he had preserved toward his wife the exact fidelity of act that is sometimes supposed to excuse any divagation of feeling; so that, for years, the tie between them had consisted mainly in his abstaining from making love to other women. The abstention had not always been easy, for the world is surprisingly well-stocked with the kind of woman one ought to have married but did not; and Lethbury had not escaped the solicitation of such alternatives. His immunity had been purchased at the cost of taking refuge in the somewhat rarified atmosphere of his perceptions; and his world being thus limited, he had given unusual care to its details, compensating himself for the narrowness of his horizon by the minute finish of his foreground. It was a world of fine shadings and the nicest proportions, where impulse seldom set a blundering foot, and the feast of reason was undisturbed by an intemperate flow of soul. To such a banquet his wife naturally remained uninvited. The diet would have disagreed with her, and she would probably have objected to the other guests. But Lethbury, miscalculating her needs, had hitherto supposed that he had made ample provision for them, and was consequently at liberty to enjoy his own fare without any reproach of mendicancy at his gates. Now he beheld her pressing a starved face against the windows of his life, and in his imaginative reaction he invested her with a pathos borrowed from the sense of his own shortcomings.

In the hospital, the imaginative process continued with increasing force. He looked at his wife with new eyes. Formerly she had been to him a mere bundle of negations, a labyrinth of dead walls and bolted doors. There was nothing behind the walls, and the doors led no-whither: he had sounded and listened often enough to be sure of that. Now he felt like a traveller who, exploring some ancient ruin, comes on an inner cell, intact amid the general dilapidation, and painted with images which reveal the forgotten uses of the building.

His wife stood by a white crib in one of the wards. In the crib lay a child, a year old, the nurse affirmed, but to Lethbury's eye a mere dateless fragment of humanity projected against a background of conjecture. Over this anonymous particle of life Mrs. Lethbury leaned, such ecstasy reflected in her face as strikes up, in Correggio's Night-piece, from the child's body to the mother's countenance. It was a light that irradiated and dazzled her. She looked up at an inquiry of Lethbury's, but as their glances met he perceived that she no longer saw him, that he had become as invisible to her as she had long been to him. He had to transfer his question to the nurse.

"What is the child's name?" he asked.

"We call her Jane," said the nurse.

III

Lethbury, at first, had resisted the idea of a legal adoption; but when he found that his wife's curiously limited imagination prevented her regarding the child as hers till it had been made so by process of law, he promptly withdrew his objection. On one point only he remained inflexible; and that was the changing of the waif's name. Mrs. Lethbury, almost at once, had expressed a wish to rechristen it: she fluctuated between Muriel and Gladys, deferring the moment of decision like a lady wavering between two bonnets. But Lethbury was unyielding. In the general surrender of his prejudices this one alone held out.

"But Jane is so dreadful," Mrs. Lethbury protested.

"Well, we don't know that she won't be dreadful. She may grow up a Jane."

His wife exclaimed reproachfully. "The nurse says she's the loveliest--"

"Don't they always say that?" asked Lethbury patiently. He was prepared to be inexhaustibly patient now that he had reached a firm foothold of opposition.

"It's cruel to call her Jane," Mrs. Lethbury pleaded.

"It's ridiculous to call her Muriel."

"The nurse is sure she must be a lady's child."

Lethbury winced: he had tried, all along, to keep his mind off the question of antecedents.

"Well, let her prove it," he said, with a rising sense of exasperation. He wondered how he could ever have allowed himself to be drawn into such a ridiculous business; for the first time he felt the full irony of it. He had visions of coming home in the afternoon to a house smelling of linseed and paregoric, and of being greeted by a chronic howl as he went up stairs to dress for dinner. He had never been a club-man, but he saw himself becoming one now.

The worst of his anticipations were unfulfilled. The baby was surprisingly well and surprisingly quiet. Such infantile remedies as she absorbed were not potent enough to be perceived beyond the nursery; and when Lethbury could be induced to enter that sanctuary, there was nothing to jar his nerves in the mild pink presence of his adopted daughter. Jars there were, indeed: they were probably inevitable in the

disturbed routine of the household; but they occurred between Mrs. Lethbury and the nurses, and Jane contributed to them only a placid stare which might have served as a rebuke to the combatants.

In the reaction from his first impulse of atonement, Lethbury noted with sharpened perceptions the effect of the change on his wife's character. He saw already the error of supposing that it could work any transformation in her. It simply magnified her existing qualities. She was like a dried sponge put in water: she expanded, but she did not change her shape. From the stand-point of scientific observation it was curious to see how her stored instincts responded to the pseudo-maternal call. She overflowed with the petty maxims of the occasion. One felt in her the epitome, the consummation, of centuries of animal maternity, so that this little woman, who screamed at a mouse and was nervous about burglars, came to typify the cave-mother rending her prey for her young.

It was less easy to regard philosophically the practical effects of her borrowed motherhood. Lethbury found with surprise that she was becoming assertive and definite. She no longer represented the negative side of his life; she showed, indeed, a tendency to inconvenient affirmations. She had gradually expanded her assumption of motherhood till it included his own share in the relation, and he suddenly found himself regarded as the father of Jane. This was a contingency he had not foreseen, and it took all his philosophy to accept it; but there were moments of compensation. For Mrs. Lethbury was undoubtedly happy for the first time in years; and the thought that he had tardily contributed to this end reconciled him to the irony of the means.

At first he was inclined to reproach himself for still viewing the situation from the outside, for remaining a spectator instead of a participant. He had been allured, for a moment, by the vision of severed hands meeting over a cradle, as the whole body of domestic fiction bears witness to their doing; and the fact that no such conjunction took place he could explain only on the ground that it was a borrowed cradle. He did not dislike the little girl. She still remained to him a hypothetical presence, a query rather than a fact; but her nearness was not unpleasant, and there were moments when her tentative utterances, her groping steps, seemed to loosen the dry accretions enveloping his inner self. But even at such moments--moments which he invited and caressed--she did not bring him nearer to his wife. He now perceived that he had made a certain place in his life for Mrs. Lethbury, and that she no longer fitted into it. It was too late to enlarge the space, and so she overflowed and encroached. Lethbury struggled against the sense of submergence. He let down barrier after barrier, yielded privacy after privacy; but his wife's personality continued to dilate. She was no longer herself alone: she was herself and Jane. Gradually, in a monstrous fusion of identity, she became herself, himself and Jane; and instead of trying to adapt her to a

spare crevice of his character, he found himself carelessly squeezed into the smallest compartment of the domestic economy.

IV

He continued to tell himself that he was satisfied if his wife was happy; and it was not till the child's tenth year that he felt a doubt of her happiness.

Jane had been a preternaturally good child. During the eight years of her adoption she had caused her foster-parents no anxiety beyond those connected with the usual succession of youthful diseases. But her unknown progenitors had given her a robust constitution, and she passed unperturbed through measles, chicken-pox and whooping-cough. If there was any suffering it was endured vicariously by Mrs. Lethbury, whose temperature rose and fell with the patient's, and who could not hear Jane sneeze without visions of a marble angel weeping over a broken column. But though Jane's prompt recoveries continued to belie such premonitions, though her existence continued to move forward on an even keel of good health and good conduct, Mrs. Lethbury's satisfaction showed no corresponding advance. Lethbury, at first, was disposed to add her disappointment to the long list of feminine inconsistencies with which the sententious observer of life builds up his favorite induction; but circumstances presently led him to take a kindlier view of the case.

Hitherto his wife had regarded him as a negligible factor in Jane's evolution. Beyond providing for his adopted daughter, and effacing himself before her, he was not expected to contribute to her well-being. But as time passed he appeared to his wife in a new light. It was he who was to educate Jane. In matters of the intellect, Mrs. Lethbury was the first to declare her deficiencies--to proclaim them, even, with a certain virtuous superiority. She said she did not pretend to be clever, and there was no denying the truth of the assertion. Now, however, she seemed less ready, not to own her limitations, but to glory in them. Confronted with the problem of Jane's instruction, she stood in awe of the child.

"I have always been stupid, you know," she said to Lethbury with a new humility, "and I'm afraid I sha'n't know what is best for Jane. I'm sure she has a wonderfully good mind, and I should reproach myself if I didn't give her every opportunity." She looked at him helplessly. "You must tell me what ought to be done."

Lethbury was not unwilling to oblige her. Somewhere in his mental lumber-room there rusted a theory of education such as usually lingers among the impedimenta of the childless. He brought this out, refurbished it, and applied it to Jane. At first he thought his wife

had not overrated the quality of the child's mind. Jane seemed extraordinarily intelligent. Her precocious definiteness of mind was encouraging to her inexperienced preceptor. She had no difficulty in fixing her attention, and he felt that every fact he imparted was being etched in metal. He helped his wife to engage the best teachers, and for a while continued to take an ex-official interest in his adopted daughter's studies. But gradually his interest waned. Jane's ideas did not increase with her acquisitions. Her young mind remained a mere receptacle for facts: a kind of cold-storage from which anything that had been put there could be taken out at a moment's notice, intact but congealed. She developed, moreover, an inordinate pride in the capacity of her mental storehouse, and a tendency to pelt her public with its contents. She was overheard to jeer at her nurse for not knowing when the Saxon Heptarchy had fallen, and she alternately dazzled and depressed Mrs. Lethbury by the wealth of her chronological allusions. She showed no interest in the significance of the facts she amassed: she simply collected dates as another child might have collected stamps or marbles. To her foster-mother she seemed a prodigy of wisdom; but Lethbury saw, with a secret movement of sympathy, how the aptitudes in which Mrs. Lethbury gloried were slowly estranging her from their possessor.

"She is getting too clever for me," his wife said to him, after one of Jane's historical flights, "but I am so glad that she will be a companion to you."

Lethbury groaned in spirit. He did not look forward to Jane's companionship. She was still a good little girl: but there was something automatic and formal in her goodness, as though it were a kind of moral calisthenics that she went through for the sake of showing her agility. An early consciousness of virtue had moreover constituted her the natural guardian and adviser of her elders. Before she was fifteen she had set about reforming the household. She took Mrs. Lethbury in hand first; then she extended her efforts to the servants, with consequences more disastrous to the domestic harmony; and lastly she applied herself to Lethbury. She proved to him by statistics that he smoked too much, and that it was injurious to the optic nerve to read in bed. She took him to task for not going to church more regularly, and pointed out to him the evils of desultory reading. She suggested that a regular course of study encourages mental concentration, and hinted that inconsecutiveness of thought is a sign of approaching age.

To her adopted mother her suggestions were equally pertinent. She instructed Mrs. Lethbury in an improved way of making beef stock, and called her attention to the unhygienic qualities of carpets. She poured out distracting facts about bacilli and vegetable mould, and demonstrated that curtains and picture-frames are a hot-bed of animal organisms. She learned by heart the nutritive ingredients of the

principal articles of diet, and revolutionized the cuisine by an attempt to establish a scientific average between starch and phosphates. Four cooks left during this experiment, and Lethbury fell into the habit of dining at his club.

Once or twice, at the outset, he had tried to check Jane's ardor; but his efforts resulted only in hurting his wife's feelings. Jane remained impervious, and Mrs. Lethbury resented any attempt to protect her from her daughter. Lethbury saw that she was consoled for the sense of her own inferiority by the thought of what Jane's intellectual companionship must be to him; and he tried to keep up the illusion by enduring with what grace he might the blighting edification of Jane's discourse.

V

As Jane grew up, he sometimes avenged himself by wondering if his wife was still sorry that they had not called her Muriel. Jane was not ugly; she developed, indeed, a kind of categorical prettiness that might have been a projection of her mind. She had a creditable collection of features, but one had to take an inventory of them to find out that she was good-looking. The fusing grace had been omitted.

Mrs. Lethbury took a touching pride in her daughter's first steps in the world. She expected Jane to take by her complexion those whom she did not capture by her learning. But Jane's rosy freshness did not work any perceptible ravages. Whether the young men guessed the axioms on her lips and detected the encyclopaedia in her eye, or whether they simply found no intrinsic interest in these features, certain it is, that, in spite of her mother's heroic efforts, and of incessant calls on Lethbury's purse, Jane, at the end of her first season, had dropped hopelessly out of the running. A few duller girls found her interesting, and one or two young men came to the house with the object of meeting other young women; but she was rapidly becoming one of the social supernumeraries who are asked out only because they are on people's lists.

The blow was bitter to Mrs. Lethbury; but she consoled herself with the idea that Jane had failed because she was too clever. Jane probably shared this conviction; at all events she betrayed no consciousness of failure. She had developed a pronounced taste for society, and went out, unweariedly and obstinately, winter after winter, while Mrs. Lethbury toiled in her wake, showering attentions on oblivious hostesses. To Lethbury there was something at once tragic and exasperating in the sight of their two figures, the one conciliatory, the other dogged, both pursuing with unabated zeal the elusive prize of popularity. He even began to feel a personal stake in the pursuit, not as it concerned Jane, but as it affected his wife. He saw that the

latter was the victim of Jane's disappointment: that Jane was not above the crude satisfaction of "taking it out" of her mother. Experience checked the impulse to come to his wife's defence; and when his resentment was at its height, Jane disarmed him by giving up the struggle.

Nothing was said to mark her capitulation; but Lethbury noticed that the visiting ceased, and that the dressmaker's bills diminished. At the same time, Mrs. Lethbury made it known that Jane had taken up charities; and before long Jane's conversation confirmed this announcement. At first Lethbury congratulated himself on the change; but Jane's domesticity soon began to weigh on him. During the day she was sometimes absent on errands of mercy; but in the evening she was always there. At first she and Mrs. Lethbury sat in the drawing-room together, and Lethbury smoked in the library; but presently Jane formed the habit of joining him there, and he began to suspect that he was included among the objects of her philanthropy.

Mrs. Lethbury confirmed the suspicion. "Jane has grown very serious-minded lately," she said. "She imagines that she used to neglect you, and she is trying to make up for it. Don't discourage her," she added innocently.

Such a plea delivered Lethbury helpless to his daughter's ministrations: and he found himself measuring the hours he spent with her by the amount of relief they must be affording her mother. There were even moments when he read a furtive gratitude in Mrs. Lethbury's eye.

But Lethbury was no hero, and he had nearly reached the limit of vicarious endurance when something wonderful happened. They never quite knew afterward how it had come about, or who first perceived it; but Mrs. Lethbury one day gave tremulous voice to their inferences.

"Of course," she said, "he comes here because of Elise." The young lady in question, a friend of Jane's, was possessed of attractions which had already been found to explain the presence of masculine visitors.

Lethbury risked a denial. "I don't think he does," he declared.

"But Elise is thought very pretty," Mrs. Lethbury insisted.

"I can't help that," said Lethbury doggedly.

He saw a faint light in his wife's eyes; but she remarked carelessly: "Mr. Budd would be a very good match for Elise."

Lethbury could hardly repress a chuckle: he was so exquisitely aware that she was trying to propitiate the gods.

For a few weeks neither said a word; then Mrs. Lethbury once more reverted to the subject.

"It is a month since Elise went abroad," she said.

"Is it?"

"And Mr. Budd seems to come here just as often--"

"Ah," said Lethbury with heroic indifference; and his wife hastily changed the subject.

Mr. Winstanley Budd was a young man who suffered from an excess of manner. Politeness gushed from him in the driest seasons. He was always performing feats of drawing-room chivalry, and the approach of the most unobtrusive female threw him into attitudes which endangered the furniture. His features, being of the cherubic order, did not lend themselves to this role; but there were moments when he appeared to dominate them, to force them into compliance with an aquiline ideal. The range of Mr. Budd's social benevolence made its object hard to distinguish. He spread his cloak so indiscriminately that one could not always interpret the gesture, and Jane's impassive manner had the effect of increasing his demonstrations: she threw him into paroxysms of politeness.

At first he filled the house with his amenities; but gradually it became apparent that his most dazzling effects were directed exclusively to Jane. Lethbury and his wife held their breath and looked away from each other. They pretended not to notice the frequency of Mr. Budd's visits, they struggled against an imprudent inclination to leave the young people too much alone. Their conclusions were the result of indirect observation, for neither of them dared to be caught watching Mr. Budd: they behaved like naturalists on the trail of a rare butterfly.

In his efforts not to notice Mr. Budd, Lethbury centred his attentions on Jane; and Jane, at this crucial moment, wrung from him a reluctant admiration. While her parents went about dissembling their emotions, she seemed to have none to conceal. She betrayed neither eagerness nor surprise; so complete was her unconcern that there were moments when Lethbury feared it was obtuseness, when he could hardly help whispering to her that now was the moment to lower the net.

Meanwhile the velocity of Mr. Budd's gyrations increased with the ardor of courtship: his politeness became incandescent, and Jane found herself the centre of a pyrotechnical display culminating in the "set piece" of an offer of marriage.

Mrs. Lethbury imparted the news to her husband one evening after their daughter had gone to bed. The announcement was made and received with an air of detachment, as though both feared to be betrayed into unseemly exultation; but Lethbury, as his wife ended, could not repress the inquiry, "Have they decided on a day?"

Mrs. Lethbury's superior command of her features enabled her to look shocked. "What can you be thinking of? He only offered himself at five!"

"Of course--of course--" stammered Lethbury--"but nowadays people marry after such short engagements--"

"Engagement!" said his wife solemnly. "There is no engagement."

Lethbury dropped his cigar. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Jane is thinking it over."

"Thinking it over?" "She has asked for a month before deciding."

Lethbury sank back with a gasp. Was it genius or was it madness? He felt incompetent to decide; and Mrs. Lethbury's next words showed that she shared his difficulty.

"Of course I don't want to hurry Jane--"

"Of course not," he acquiesced.

"But I pointed out to her that a young man of Mr. Budd's impulsive temperament might--might be easily discouraged--"

"Yes; and what did she say?"

"She said that if she was worth winning she was worth waiting for."

VI

The period of Mr. Budd's probation could scarcely have cost him as much mental anguish as it caused his would-be parents-in-law.

Mrs. Lethbury, by various ruses, tried to shorten the ordeal, but Jane remained inexorable; and each morning Lethbury came down to breakfast with the certainty of finding a letter of withdrawal from her discouraged suitor.

When at length the decisive day came, and Mrs. Lethbury, at its close, stole into the library with an air of chastened joy, they stood for a moment without speaking; then Mrs. Lethbury paid a fitting tribute to

the proprieties by faltering out: "It will be dreadful to have to give her up--"

Lethbury could not repress a warning gesture; but even as it escaped him, he realized that his wife's grief was genuine.

"Of course, of course," he said, vainly sounding his own emotional shallows for an answering regret. And yet it was his wife who had suffered most from Jane!

He had fancied that these sufferings would be effaced by the milder atmosphere of their last weeks together; but felicity did not soften Jane. Not for a moment did she relax her dominion: she simply widened it to include a new subject. Mr. Budd found himself under orders with the others; and a new fear assailed Lethbury as he saw Jane assume prenuptial control of her betrothed. Lethbury had never felt any strong personal interest in Mr. Budd; but, as Jane's prospective husband, the young man excited his sympathy. To his surprise, he found that Mrs. Lethbury shared the feeling.

"I'm afraid he may find Jane a little exacting," she said, after an evening dedicated to a stormy discussion of the wedding arrangements. "She really ought to make some concessions. If he wants to be married in a black frock-coat instead of a dark gray one--" She paused and looked doubtfully at Lethbury.

"What can I do about it?" he said.

"You might explain to him--tell him that Jane isn't always--"

Lethbury made an impatient gesture. "What are you afraid of? His finding her out or his not finding her out?"

Mrs. Lethbury flushed. "You put it so dreadfully!"

Her husband mused for a moment; then he said with an air of cheerful hypocrisy: "After all, Budd is old enough to take care of himself."

But the next day Mrs. Lethbury surprised him. Late in the afternoon she entered the library, so breathless and inarticulate that he scented a catastrophe.

"I've done it!" she cried.

"Done what?"

"Told him." She nodded toward the door. "He's just gone. Jane is out, and I had a chance to talk to him alone."

Lethbury pushed a chair forward and she sank into it.

"What did you tell him? That she is _not_ always--"

Mrs. Lethbury lifted a tragic eye. "No; I told him that she always _is_--"

"Always _is_--?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. Lethbury made a call on his hoarded philosophy. He saw Jane suddenly reinstated in her evening seat by the library fire; but an answering chord in him thrilled at his wife's heroism.

"Well--what did he say?"

Mrs. Lethbury's agitation deepened. It was clear that the blow had fallen.

"He...he said...that we...had never understood Jane... or appreciated her..." The final syllables were lost in her handkerchief, and she left him marvelling at the mechanism of a woman.

After that, Lethbury faced the future with an undaunted eye. They had done their duty--at least his wife had done hers--and they were reaping the usual harvest of ingratitude with a zest seldom accorded to such reaping. There was a marked change in Mr. Budd's manner, and his increasing coldness sent a genial glow through Lethbury's system. It was easy to bear with Jane in the light of Mr. Budd's disapproval.

There was a good deal to be borne in the last days, and the brunt of it fell on Mrs. Lethbury. Jane marked her transition to the married state by an appropriate but incongruous display of nerves. She became sentimental, hysterical and reluctant. She quarrelled with her betrothed and threatened to return the ring. Mrs. Lethbury had to intervene, and Lethbury felt the hovering sword of destiny. But the blow was suspended. Mr. Budd's chivalry was proof against all his bride's caprices, and his devotion thrived on her cruelty. Lethbury feared that he was too faithful, too enduring, and longed to urge him to vary his tactics. Jane presently reappeared with the ring on her finger, and consented to try on the wedding-dress; but her uncertainties, her reactions, were prolonged till the final day.

When it dawned, Lethbury was still in an ecstasy of apprehension. Feeling reasonably sure of the principal actors, he had centred his fears on incidental possibilities. The clergyman might have a stroke, or the church might burn down, or there might be something wrong with the license. He did all that was humanly possible to avert such

contingencies, but there remained that incalculable factor known as the hand of God. Lethbury seemed to feel it groping for him.

In the church it almost had him by the nape. Mr. Budd was late; and for five immeasurable minutes Lethbury and Jane faced a churchful of conjecture. Then the bridegroom appeared, flushed but chivalrous, and explaining to his father-in-law under cover of the ritual that he had torn his glove and had to go back for another.

"You'll be losing the ring next," muttered Lethbury; but Mr. Budd produced this article punctually, and a moment or two later was bearing its wearer captive down the aisle.

At the wedding-breakfast Lethbury caught his wife's eye fixed on him in mild disapproval, and understood that his hilarity was exceeding the bounds of fitness. He pulled himself together, and tried to subdue his tone; but his jubilation bubbled over like a champagne-glass perpetually refilled. The deeper his draughts, the higher it rose.

It was at the brim when, in the wake of the dispersing guests, Jane came down in her travelling-dress and fell on her mother's neck.

"I can't leave you!" she wailed, and Lethbury felt as suddenly sobered as a man under a douche. But if the bride was reluctant her captor was relentless. Never had Mr. Budd been more dominant, more aquiline. Lethbury's last fears were dissipated as the young man snatched Jane from her mother's bosom and bore her off to the brougham.

The brougham rolled away, the last milliner's girl forsook her post by the awning, the red carpet was folded up, and the house door closed. Lethbury stood alone in the hall with his wife. As he turned toward her, he noticed the look of tired heroism in her eyes, the deepened lines of her face. They reflected his own symptoms too accurately not to appeal to him. The nervous tension had been horrible. He went up to her, and an answering impulse made her lay a hand on his arm. He held it there a moment.

"Let us go off and have a jolly little dinner at a restaurant," he proposed.

There had been a time when such a suggestion would have surprised her to the verge of disapproval; but now she agreed to it at once.

"Oh, that would be so nice," she murmured with a great sigh of relief and assuagement.

Jane had fulfilled her mission after all: she had drawn them together at last.

THE FINISH OF PATSY BARNES

from: The Project Gutenberg eBook, *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories*, by Paul Laurence Dunbar,

His name was Patsy Barnes, and he was a denizen of Little Africa. In fact, he lived on Douglass Street. By all the laws governing the relations between people and their names, he should have been Irish--but he was not. He was colored, and very much so. That was the reason he lived on Douglass Street. The negro has very strong within him the instinct of colonization and it was in accordance with this that Patsy's mother had found her way to Little Africa when she had come North from Kentucky.

Patsy was incorrigible. Even into the confines of Little Africa had penetrated the truant officer and the terrible penalty of the compulsory education law. Time and time again had poor Eliza Barnes been brought up on account of the shortcomings of that son of hers. She was a hard-working, honest woman, and day by day bent over her tub, scrubbing away to keep Patsy in shoes and jackets, that would wear out so much faster than they could be bought. But she never murmured, for she loved the boy with a deep affection, though his misdeeds were a sore thorn in her side.

She wanted him to go to school. She wanted him to learn. She had the notion that he might become something better, something higher than she had been. But for him school had no charms; his school was the cool stalls in the big livery stable near at hand; the arena of his pursuits its sawdust floor; the height of his ambition, to be a horseman. Either here or in the racing stables at the Fair-grounds he spent his truant hours. It was a school that taught much, and Patsy was as apt a pupil as he was a constant attendant. He learned strange things about horses, and fine, sonorous oaths that sounded eerie on his young lips, for he had only turned into his fourteenth year.

A man goes where he is appreciated; then could this slim black boy be blamed for doing the same thing? He was a great favorite with the horsemen, and picked up many a dime or nickel for dancing or singing, or even a quarter for warming up a horse for its owner. He was not to be blamed for this, for, first of all, he was born in Kentucky, and had spent the very days of his infancy about the paddocks near Lexington, where his father had sacrificed his life on account of his love for horses. The little fellow had shed no tears when he looked at his father's bleeding body, bruised and broken by the fiery young two-year-old he was trying to subdue. Patsy did not sob or whimper, though his heart ached, for over all the feeling of his grief was a mad, burning desire to ride that horse.

His tears were shed, however, when, actuated by the idea that times would be easier up North, they moved to Dalesford. Then, when he learned that he must leave his old friends, the horses and their masters, whom he had known, he wept. The comparatively meagre appointments of the Fair-grounds at Dalesford proved a poor compensation for all these. For the first few weeks Patsy had dreams of running away--back to Kentucky and the horses and stables. Then after a while he settled himself with heroic resolution to make the best of what he had, and with a mighty effort took up the burden of life away from his beloved home.

Eliza Barnes, older and more experienced though she was, took up her burden with a less cheerful philosophy than her son. She worked hard, and made a scanty livelihood, it is true, but she did not make the best of what she had. Her complainings were loud in the land, and her wailings for her old home smote the ears of any who would listen to her.

They had been living in Dalesford for a year nearly, when hard work and exposure brought the woman down to bed with pneumonia. They were very poor--too poor even to call in a doctor, so there was nothing to do but to call in the city physician. Now this medical man had too frequent calls into Little Africa, and he did not like to go there. So he was very gruff when any of its denizens called him, and it was even said that he was careless of his patients.

Patsy's heart bled as he heard the doctor talking to his mother:

"Now, there can't be any foolishness about this," he said. "You've got to stay in bed and not get yourself damp."

"How long you think I got to lay hyeah, doctah?" she asked.

"I'm a doctor, not a fortune-teller," was the reply. "You'll lie there as long as the disease holds you."

"But I can't lay hyeah long, doctah, case I ain't got nuffin' to go on."

"Well, take your choice: the bed or the boneyard."

Eliza began to cry.

"You needn't sniffle," said the doctor; "I don't see what you people want to come up here for anyhow. Why don't you stay down South where you belong? You come up here and you're just a burden and a trouble to the city. The South deals with all of you better, both in poverty and crime." He knew that these people did not understand him, but he

wanted an outlet for the heat within him.

There was another angry being in the room, and that was Patsy. His eyes were full of tears that scorched him and would not fall. The memory of many beautiful and appropriate oaths came to him; but he dared not let his mother hear him swear. Oh! to have a stone--to be across the street from that man!

When the physician walked out, Patsy went to the bed, took his mother's hand, and bent over shamefacedly to kiss her. He did not know that with that act the Recording Angel blotted out many a curious damn of his.

The little mark of affection comforted Eliza unspeakably. The mother-feeling overwhelmed her in one burst of tears. Then she dried her eyes and smiled at him.

"Honey," she said; "mammy ain' gwine lay hyeah long. She be all right putty soon."

"Nevah you min'," said Patsy with a choke in his voice. "I can do somep'n', an' we'll have anothah doctah."

"La, listen at de chile; what kin you do?"

"I'm goin' down to McCarthy's stable and see if I kin git some horses to exercise."

A sad look came into Eliza's eyes as she said: "You'd bettah not go, Patsy; dem hosses'll kill you yit, des lak dey did yo' pappy."

But the boy, used to doing pretty much as he pleased, was obdurate, and even while she was talking, put on his ragged jacket and left the room.

Patsy was not wise enough to be diplomatic. He went right to the point with McCarthy, the liveryman.

The big red-faced fellow slapped him until he spun round and round. Then he said, "Ye little devil, ye, I've a mind to knock the whole head off o' ye. Ye want harses to exercise, do ye? Well git on that 'un, an' see what ye kin do with him."

The boy's honest desire to be helpful had tickled the big, generous Irishman's peculiar sense of humor, and from now on, instead of giving Patsy a horse to ride now and then as he had formerly done, he put into his charge all the animals that needed exercise.

It was with a king's pride that Patsy marched home with his first

considerable earnings.

They were small yet, and would go for food rather than a doctor, but Eliza was inordinately proud, and it was this pride that gave her strength and the desire of life to carry her through the days approaching the crisis of her disease.

As Patsy saw his mother growing worse, saw her gasping for breath, heard the rattling as she drew in the little air that kept going her clogged lungs, felt the heat of her burning hands, and saw the pitiful appeal in her poor eyes, he became convinced that the city doctor was not helping her. She must have another. But the money?

That afternoon, after his work with McCarthy, found him at the Fair-grounds. The spring races were on, and he thought he might get a job warming up the horse of some independent jockey. He hung around the stables, listening to the talk of men he knew and some he had never seen before. Among the latter was a tall, lanky man, holding forth to a group of men.

"No, suh," he was saying to them generally, "I'm goin' to withdraw my hoss, because thaih ain't nobody to ride him as he ought to be rode. I haven't brought a jockey along with me, so I've got to depend on pick-ups. Now, the talent's set agin my hoss, Black Boy, because he's been losin' regular, but that hoss has lost for the want of ridin', that's all."

The crowd looked in at the slim-legged, raw-boned horse, and walked away laughing.

"The fools!" muttered the stranger. "If I could ride myself I'd show 'em!"

Patsy was gazing into the stall at the horse.

"What are you doing thaih," called the owner to him.

"Look hyeah, mistah," said Patsy, "ain't that a bluegrass hoss?"

"Of co'se it is, an' one o' the fastest that evah grazed."

"I'll ride that hoss, mistah."

"What do you know 'bout ridin'?"

"I used to gin'ally be' roun' Mistah Boone's paddock in Lexington, an'--"

"Aroun' Boone's paddock--what! Look here, little nigger, if you can

ride that hoss to a winnin' I'll give you more money than you ever seen before."

"I'll ride him."

Patsy's heart was beating very wildly beneath his jacket. That horse. He knew that glossy coat. He knew that raw-boned frame and those flashing nostrils. That black horse there owed something to the orphan he had made.

The horse was to ride in the race before the last. Somehow out of odds and ends, his owner scraped together a suit and colors for Patsy. The colors were maroon and green, a curious combination. But then it was a curious horse, a curious rider, and a more curious combination that brought the two together.

Long before the time for the race Patsy went into the stall to become better acquainted with his horse. The animal turned its wild eyes upon him and neighed. He patted the long, slender head, and grinned as the horse stepped aside as gently as a lady.

"He sholy is full o' ginger," he said to the owner, whose name he had found to be Brackett.

"He'll show 'em a thing or two," laughed Brackett.

"His dam was a fast one," said Patsy, unconsciously.

Brackett whirled on him in a flash. "What do you know about his dam?" he asked.

The boy would have retracted, but it was too late. Stammeringly he told the story of his father's death and the horse's connection therewith.

"Well," said Brackett, "if you don't turn out a hoodoo, you're a winner, sure. But I'll be blessed if this don't sound like a story! But I've heard that story before. The man I got Black Boy from, no matter how I got him, you're too young to understand the ins and outs of poker, told it to me."

When the bell sounded and Patsy went out to warm up, he felt as if he were riding on air. Some of the jockeys laughed at his get-up, but there was something in him--or under him, maybe--that made him scorn their derision. He saw a sea of faces about him, then saw no more. Only a shining white track loomed ahead of him, and a restless steed was cantering with him around the curve. Then the bell called him back to the stand.

They did not get away at first, and back they trooped. A second trial was a failure. But at the third they were off in a line as straight as a chalk-mark. There were Essex and Firefly, Queen Bess and Mosquito, galloping away side by side, and Black Boy a neck ahead. Patsy knew the family reputation of his horse for endurance as well as fire, and began riding the race from the first. Black Boy came of blood that would not be passed, and to this his rider trusted. At the eighth the line was hardly broken, but as the quarter was reached Black Boy had forged a length ahead, and Mosquito was at his flank. Then, like a flash, Essex shot out ahead under whip and spur, his jockey standing straight in the stirrups.

The crowd in the stand screamed; but Patsy smiled as he lay low over his horse's neck. He saw that Essex had made her best spurt. His only fear was for Mosquito, who hugged and hugged his flank. They were nearing the three-quarter post, and he was tightening his grip on the black. Essex fell back; his spurt was over. The whip fell unheeded on his sides. The spurs dug him in vain.

Black Boy's breath touches the leader's ear. They are neck and neck--nose to nose. The black stallion passes him.

Another cheer from the stand, and again Patsy smiles as they turn into the stretch. Mosquito has gained a head. The colored boy flashes one glance at the horse and rider who are so surely gaining upon him, and his lips close in a grim line. They are half-way down the stretch, and Mosquito's head is at the stallion's neck.

For a single moment Patsy thinks of the sick woman at home and what that race will mean to her, and then his knees close against the horse's sides with a firmer dig. The spurs shoot deeper into the steaming flanks. Black Boy shall win; he must win. The horse that has taken away his father shall give him back his mother. The stallion leaps away like a flash, and goes under the wire--a length ahead.

Then the band thundered, and Patsy was off his horse, very warm and very happy, following his mount to the stable. There, a little later, Brackett found him. He rushed to him, and flung his arms around him.

"You little devil," he cried, "you rode like you were kin to that hoss! We've won! We've won!" And he began sticking banknotes at the boy. At first Patsy's eyes bulged, and then he seized the money and got into his clothes.

"Goin' out to spend it?" asked Brackett.

"I'm goin' for a doctah fu' my mother," said Patsy, "she's sick."

"Don't let me lose sight of you."

"Oh, I'll see you again. So long," said the boy.

An hour later he walked into his mother's room with a very big doctor, the greatest the druggist could direct him to. The doctor left his medicines and his orders, but, when Patsy told his story, it was Eliza's pride that started her on the road to recovery. Patsy did not tell his horse's name.

A Shockingly Rude Article

from: Project Gutenberg's *My Miscellanies, Vol. 1 (of 2)*, by Wilkie Collins

[Communicated by A Charming Woman.]

Before I begin to write, I know that this will be an unpopular composition in certain select quarters. I mean to proceed with it, however, in spite of that conviction, because when I have got something on my mind, I must positively speak. Is it necessary, after that, to confess that I am a woman? If it is, I make the confession--to my sorrow. I would much rather be a man.

I hope nobody will be misled by my beginning in this way, into thinking that I am an advocate of the rights of women. Ridiculous creatures! they have too many rights already; and if they don't hold their chattering tongues, one of these days the poor dear deluded men will find them out.

The poor dear men! Mentioning them reminds me of what I have got to say. I have been staying at the seaside, and reading an immense quantity of novels and periodicals, and all that sort of thing, lately; and my idea is, that the men-writers (the only writers worth reading) are in the habit of using each other very unfairly in books and articles, and so on. Look where I may, I find, for instance, that the large proportion of the bad characters in their otherwise very charming stories, are always men. As if women were not a great deal worse! Then, again, most of the amusing fools in their books are, strangely and unaccountably, of their own sex, in spite of its being perfectly apparent that the vast majority of that sort of character is to be found in ours. On the other hand, while they make out their own half of humanity (as I have distinctly proved) a great deal too bad, they go to the contrary extreme the other way, and make out our half a great deal too good. What in the world do they mean by representing us as so much better, and so much prettier, than we really are? Upon my word, when I see what angels the dear nice good men make of their heroines, and when I think of myself, and of the whole circle of my female friends besides, I feel quite disgusted,--I do, indeed.

I should very much like to go into the whole of this subject at once, and speak my sentiments on it at the fullest length. But I will spare the reader, and try to be satisfied with going into a part of the subject instead; for, considering that I am a woman, and making immense allowances for me on that account, I am really not altogether unreasonable. Give me a page or two, and I will show in one particular, and, what is more, from real life, how absurdly partial the men-writers are to our sex, and how scandalously unjust they are

to their own.

Bores.--What I propose is, that we take for our present example characters of Bores alone. If we were only to read men's novels, articles, and so forth, I don't hesitate to say we should assume that all the Bores in the human creation were of the male sex. It is generally, if not always, a man, in men's books, who tells the long-winded story, and turns up at the wrong time, and makes himself altogether odious and intolerable to everybody he comes in contact with, without being in the least aware of it himself. How very unjust, and, I must be allowed to add, how extremely untrue! Women are quite as bad, or worse. Do, good gentlemen, look about you impartially, for once in a way, and own the truth. Good gracious! is not society full of Lady-Bores? Why not give them a turn when you write next?

Two instances: I will quote only two instances out of hundreds I could produce from my own acquaintance. Only two: because, as I said before, I am reasonable about not taking up room. I can put things into a very small space when I write, as well as when I travel. I should like the literary gentleman who kindly prints this (I would not allow a woman to print it for any sum of money that could be offered me) to see how very little luggage I travel with. At any rate, he shall see how little room I can cheerfully put up with in these pages.

My first Lady-Bore--see how quickly I get to the matter in hand, without wasting so much as a single line in prefatory phrases!--my first Lady-Bore is Miss Sticker. I don't in the least mind mentioning her name; because I know, if she got the chance, she would do just the same by me. It is of no use disguising the fact, so I may as well confess at once that Miss Sticker is a fright. Far be it from me to give pain where the thing can by any means be avoided; but if I were to say that Miss Sticker would ever see forty again, I should be guilty of an unwarrantable deception on the public. I have the strongest imaginable objection to mentioning the word petticoats; but if that is the only possible description of Miss Sticker's figure which conveys a true notion of its nature and composition, what am I to do? Perhaps I had better give up describing the poor thing's personal appearance. I shall get into deeper and deeper difficulties, if I attempt to go on. The very last time I was in her company, we were strolling about Regent Street, with my sister's husband for escort. As we passed a hairdresser's shop, the dear simple man looked in, and asked me what those long tails of hair were for, that he saw hanging up in the windows. Miss Sticker, poor soul, was on his arm, and heard him put the question. I thought I should have dropped.

This is, I believe, what you call a digression. I shall let it stop in, however, because it will probably explain to the judicious reader why I carefully avoid the subject--the meagre subject, an ill-natured person might say--of Miss Sticker's hair. Suppose I pass on to what is

more importantly connected with the object of these pages--suppose I describe Miss Sticker's character next.

Some extremely sensible man has observed somewhere, that a Bore is a person with one idea. Exactly so. Miss Sticker is a person with one idea. Unhappily for society, her notion is, that she is bound by the laws of politeness to join in every conversation which happens to be proceeding within the range of her ears. She has no ideas, no information, no flow of language, no tact, no power of saying the right word at the right time, even by chance. And yet she will converse, as she calls it. "A gentlewoman, my dear, becomes a mere cipher in society unless she can converse." That is her way of putting it; and I deeply regret to add, she is one of the few people who preach what they practise. Her course of proceeding is, first, to check the conversation by making a remark which has no kind of relation to the topic under discussion. She next stops it altogether by being suddenly at a loss for some particular word which nobody can suggest. At last the word is given up; another subject is started in despair; and the company become warmly interested in it. Just at that moment, Miss Sticker finds the lost word; screams it out triumphantly in the middle of the talk; and so scatters the second subject to the winds, exactly as she has already scattered the first.

The last time I called at my aunt's--I merely mention this by way of example--I found Miss Sticker there, and three delightful men. One was a clergyman of the dear old purple-faced Port-wine school. The other two would have looked military, if one of them had not been an engineer, and the other an editor of a newspaper. We should have had some delightful conversation if the Lady-Bore had not been present. In some way, I really forget how, we got to talking about giving credit and paying debts; and the dear old clergyman, with his twinkling eyes and his jolly voice, treated us to a professional anecdote on the subject.

"Talking about that," he began, "I married a man the other day for the third time. Man in my parish. Capital cricketer when he was young enough to run. 'What's your fee?' says he. 'Licensed marriage?' says I; 'guinea of course.'--'I've got to bring you your tithes in three weeks, sir,' says he; 'give me tick till then.' 'All right,' says I, and married him. In three weeks he comes and pays his tithes like a man. 'Now, sir,' says he, 'about this marriage-fee, sir? I do hope you'll kindly let me off at half-price, for I have married a bitter bad 'un this time. I've got a half-a-guinea about me, sir, if you'll only please to take it. She isn't worth a farthing more--on the word of a man, she isn't, sir!' I looked hard in his face, and saw two scratches on it, and took the half-guinea, more out of pity than anything else. Lesson to me, however. Never marry a man on credit again, as long as I live. Cash on all future occasions--cash down, or no marriage!"

While he was speaking, I had my eye on Miss Sticker. Thanks to the luncheon which was on the table, she was physically incapable of "conversing" while our reverend friend was telling his humorous little anecdote. Just as he had done, and just as the editor of the newspaper was taking up the subject, she finished her chicken, and turned round from the table.

"Cash down, my dear sir, as you say," continued the editor. "You exactly describe our great principle of action in the Press. Some of the most extraordinary and amusing things happen with subscribers to newspapers----"

"Ah, the Press!" burst in Miss Sticker, beginning to converse. "What a wonderful engine! and how grateful we ought to feel when we get the paper so regularly every morning at breakfast. The only question is--at least, many people think so--I mean with regard to the Press, the only question is whether it ought to be----"

Here Miss Sticker lost the next word, and all the company had to look for it.

"With regard to the Press, the only question is, whether it ought to be----O, dear, dear, dear me!" cried Miss Sticker, lifting both her hands in despair, "what is the word?"

"Cheaper?" suggested our reverend friend. "Hang it, ma'am! it can hardly be that, when it is down to a penny already."

"O no; not cheaper," said Miss Sticker.

"More independent?" inquired the editor. "If you mean that, I defy anybody to find more fearless exposures of corruption----"

"No, no!" cried Miss Sticker, in an agony of polite confusion. "I didn't mean that. More independent wasn't the word."

"Better printed?" suggested the engineer.

"On better paper?" added my aunt.

"It can't be done--if you refer to the cheap press--it can't be done for the money," interposed the editor, irritably.

"O, but that's not it!" continued Miss Sticker, wringing her bony fingers, with horrid black mittens on them. "I didn't mean to say better printed, or better paper. It was one word I meant, not two.--With regard to the Press," pursued Miss Sticker, repeating her own ridiculous words carefully, as an aid to memory, "the only

question is, whether it ought to be----Bless my heart, how extraordinary! Well, well, never mind: I'm quite shocked, and ashamed of myself. Pray go on talking, and don't notice me."

It was all very well to say, Go on talking; but the editor's amusing story about subscribers to newspapers, had been, by this time, fatally interrupted. As usual, Miss Sticker had stopped us in full flow. The engineer considerably broke the silence by starting another subject.

"Here are some wedding-cards on your table," he said, to my aunt, "which I am very glad to see there. The bridegroom is an old friend of mine. His wife is really a beauty. You know how he first became acquainted with her? No? It was quite an adventure, I assure you. One evening he was on the Brighton Railway; last down train. A lovely girl in the carriage; our friend Dilberry immensely struck with her. Got her to talk after a long time, with great difficulty. Within half an hour of Brighton, the lovely girl smiles, and says to our friend, 'Shall we be very long now, sir, before we get to Gravesend?' Case of confusion at that dreadful London Bridge Terminus. Dilberry explained that she would be at Brighton in half an hour, upon which the lovely girl instantly and properly burst into tears. 'O, what shall I do! O, what will my friends think!' Second flood of tears.--'Suppose you telegraph?' says Dilberry soothingly.--'O, but I don't know how!' says the lovely girl. Out comes Dilberry's pocket-book. Sly dog! he saw his way now to finding out who her friends were. 'Pray let me write the necessary message for you,' says Dilberry. 'Who shall I direct to at Gravesend?'--'My father and mother are staying there with some friends,' says the lovely girl. 'I came up with a day-ticket, and I saw a crowd of people when I came back to the station, all going one way, and I was hurried and frightened, and nobody told me, and it was late in the evening, and the bell was ringing, and, O Heavens! what will become of me!' Third burst of tears.--'We will telegraph to your father,' says Dilberry. 'Pray don't distress yourself. Only tell me who your father is.'--'Thank you a thousand times,' says the lovely girl, 'my father is----'"

"ANONYMOUS!" shouts Miss Sticker, producing her lost word with a perfect burst of triumph. "How glad I am I remembered it at last! Bless me," exclaims the Lady-Bore, quite unconscious that she has brought the engineer's story to an abrupt conclusion, by giving his distressed damsel an anonymous father; "Bless me! what are you all laughing at? I only meant to say that the question with regard to the Press was, whether it ought to be anonymous. What in the world is there to laugh at in that? I really don't see the joke."

And this woman escapes scot-free, while comparatively innocent men are held up to ridicule, in novel after novel, by dozens at a time! When will the deluded male writers see my sex in its true colours, and describe it accordingly? When will Miss Sticker take her proper place

in the literature of England?

* * * * *

My second Lady-Bore is that hateful creature, Mrs. Tincklepaw. Where, over the whole interesting surface of male humanity (including Cannibals)--where is the man to be found whom it would not be scandalous to mention in the same breath with Mrs. Tincklepaw? The great delight of this shocking woman's life, is to squabble with her husband (poor man, he has my warmest sympathy and best good wishes), and then to bring the quarrel away from home with her, and to let it off again at society in general, in a series of short spiteful hints. Mrs. Tincklepaw is the exact opposite of Miss Sticker. She is a very little woman; she is (and more shame for her, considering how she acts) young enough to be Miss Sticker's daughter; and she has a kind of snappish tact in worrying innocent people, under every possible turn of circumstances, which distinguishes her (disgracefully) from the poor feeble-minded Maid-Bore, to whom the reader has been already introduced. Here are some examples--all taken, be it observed, from my own personal observation--of the manner in which Mrs. Tincklepaw contrives to persecute her harmless fellow-creatures wherever she happens to meet with them:

Let us say I am out walking, and I happen to meet Mr. and Mrs. Tincklepaw. (By the bye, she never lets her husband out of her sight--he is too necessary to the execution of her schemes of petty torment. And such a noble creature, to be used for so base a purpose! He stands six feet two, and is additionally distinguished by a glorious and majestic stoutness, which has no sort of connection with the comparatively comic element of fat. His nature, considering what a wife he has got, is inexcusably meek and patient. Instead of answering her, he strokes his magnificent flaxen whiskers, and looks up resignedly at the sky. I sometimes fancy that he stands too high to hear what his dwarf of a wife says. For his sake, poor man, I hope this view of the matter may be the true one.)

I am afraid I have contrived to lose myself in a long parenthesis. Where was I? O! out walking and happening to meet with Mr. and Mrs. Tincklepaw. She has had a quarrel with her husband at home, and this is how she contrives to let me know it.

"Delightful weather, dear, is it not?" I say, as we shake hands.

"Charming, indeed," says Mrs. Tincklepaw. "Do you know, love, I am so glad you made that remark to me, and not to Mr. Tincklepaw?"

"Really?" I ask. "Pray tell me why?"

"Because," answers the malicious creature, "if you had said it was a

fine day to Mr. Tincklepaw, I should have been so afraid of his frowning at you directly, and saying, 'Stuff! talk of something worth listening to, if you talk at all.' What a love of a bonnet you have got on! and how Mr. Tincklepaw would have liked to be staying in your house when you were getting ready to-day to go out. He would have waited for you so patiently, dear. He would never have stamped in the passage; and no such words as, 'Deuce take the woman! is she going to keep me here all day?' would by any possibility have escaped his lips. Don't love! don't look at the shops, while Mr. Tincklepaw is with us. He might say, 'Oh, bother! you're always wanting to buy something!' I shouldn't like that to happen. Should you, dear?"

Once more. Say I meet Mr. and Mrs. Tincklepaw at a dinner-party, given in honour of a bride and bridegroom. From the instant when she enters the house, Mrs. Tincklepaw never has her eye off the young couple. She looks at them with an expression of heart-broken curiosity. Whenever they happen to speak to each other, she instantly suspends any conversation in which she is engaged, and listens to them with a mournful eagerness. When the ladies retire, she gets the bride into a corner; appropriates her to herself for the rest of the evening; and persecutes the wretched young woman in this manner:--

"May I ask, is this your first dinner, since you came back?"

"O, no! we have been in town for some weeks."

"Indeed? I should really have thought, now, that this was your first dinner."

"Should you? I can't imagine why."

"How very odd, when the reason is as plain as possible! Why, I noticed you all dinner time, eating and drinking what you liked, without looking at your husband for orders. I saw nothing rebellious in your face when you eat all these nice sweet things at dessert. Dear! dear! don't you understand? Do you really mean to say that your husband has not begun yet? Did he not say, as you drove here to day, 'Now, mind, I'm not going to have another night's rest broken, because you always choose to make yourself ill with stuffing creams and sweets, and all that sort of thing?' No!!! Mercy on me, what an odd man he must be! Perhaps he waits till he gets home again? O, come, come, you don't mean to tell me that he doesn't storm at you frightfully, for having every one of your glasses filled with wine, and then never touching a drop of it, but asking for cold water instead, at the very elbow of the master of the house? If he says, 'Cursed perversity, and want of proper tact' once, I know he says it a dozen times. And as for treading on your dress in the hall, and then bullying you before the servant, for not holding it up out of his way, it's too common a thing to be mentioned--isn't it? Did you notice Mr. Tincklepaw particularly?

Ah, you did, and you thought he looked good-natured? No! no! don't say any more; don't say you know better than to trust to appearances. Please do take leave of all common sense and experience, and pray trust to appearances, without thinking of their invariable deceitfulness, this once. Do, dear, to oblige _me_."

I might fill pages with similar examples of the manners and conversation of this intolerable Lady-Bore. I might add other equally aggravating characters, to her character and to Miss Sticker's, without extending my researches an inch beyond the circle of my own acquaintance. But I am true to my unfeminine resolution to write as briefly as if I were a man; and I feel that I have said enough, already, to show that I can prove my case. When a woman like me can produce, without the least hesitation, or the slightest difficulty, two such instances of Lady-Bores as I have just exhibited, the additional number which she might pick out of her list, after a little mature reflection, may be logically inferred by all impartial readers.

In the meantime, let me hope I have succeeded sufficiently well in my present purpose to induce our next great satirist to pause before he, too, attacks his harmless fellow-men, and to make him turn his withering glance in the direction of our sex. Let all rising young gentlemen who are racking their brains in search of originality, take the timely hint which I have given them in these pages. Let us have a new fictitious literature, in which not only the Bores shall be women, but the villains too. Look at Shakespeare--do, pray, look at Shakespeare. Who is most in fault, in that shocking business of the murder of King Duncan? Lady Macbeth, to be sure! Look at King Lear, with a small family of only three daughters, and two of the three, wretches; and even the third an aggravating girl, who can't be commonly civil to her own father in the first Act, out of sheer contradiction, because her elder sisters happen to have been civil before her. Look at Desdemona, who falls in love with a horrid copper-coloured foreigner, and then, like a fool, instead of managing him, aggravates him into smothering her. Ah! Shakespeare was a great man, and knew our sex, and was not afraid to show he knew it. What a blessing it would be, if some of his literary brethren, in modern times, could muster courage enough to follow his example!

I have fifty different things to say, but I shall bring myself to a conclusion by only mentioning one of them. If it would at all contribute towards forwarding the literary reform that I advocate, to make a present of the characters of Miss Sticker and Mrs. Tincklepaw, to modern writers of fiction, I shall be delighted to abandon all right of proprietorship in those two odious women. At the same time, I think it fair to explain that when I speak of modern writers, I mean gentlemen-writers only. I wish to say nothing uncivil to the ladies who compose books, whose effusions may, by the rule of contraries, be exceedingly agreeable to male readers; but I positively forbid them to

lay hands upon my two characters. I am charmed to be of use to the men, in a literary point of view, but I decline altogether to mix myself up with the women. There need be no fear of offending them by printing this candid expression of my intentions. Depend on it, they will all declare, on their sides, that they would much rather have nothing to do with _me_.

Cupid a la Carte

from: The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Heart of the West*, by O. Henry

"The dispositions of woman," said Jeff Peters, after various opinions on the subject had been advanced, "run, regular, to diversions. What a woman wants is what you're out of. She wants more of a thing when it's scarce. She likes to have souvenirs of things that never happened. She likes to be reminded of things she never heard of. A one-sided view of objects is disjoining to the female composition.

"'Tis a misfortune of mine, begotten by nature and travel," continued Jeff, looking thoughtfully between his elevated feet at the grocery stove, "to look deeper into some subjects than most people do. I've breathed gasoline smoke talking to street crowds in nearly every town in the United States. I've held 'em spellbound with music, oratory, sleight of hand, and prevarications, while I've sold 'em jewelry, medicine, soap, hair tonic, and junk of other nominations. And during my travels, as a matter of recreation and expiation, I've taken cognisance some of women. It takes a man a lifetime to find out about one particular woman; but if he puts in, say, ten years, industrious and curious, he can acquire the general rudiments of the sex. One lesson I picked up was when I was working the West with a line of Brazilian diamonds and a patent fire kindler just after my trip from Savannah down through the cotton belt with Dalby's Anti-explosive Lamp Oil Powder. 'Twas when the Oklahoma country was in first bloom. Guthrie was rising in the middle of it like a lump of self-raising dough. It was a boom town of the regular kind--you stood in line to get a chance to wash your face; if you ate over ten minutes you had a lodging bill added on; if you slept on a plank at night they charged it to you as board the next morning.

"By nature and doctrines I am addicted to the habit of discovering choice places wherein to feed. So I looked around and found a proposition that exactly cut the mustard. I found a restaurant tent just opened up by an outfit that had drifted in on the tail of the boom. They had knocked together a box house, where they lived and did the cooking, and served the meals in a tent pitched against the side. That tent was joyful with placards on it calculated to redeem the world-worn pilgrim from the sinfulness of boarding houses and pick-me-up hotels. 'Try Mother's Home-Made Biscuits,' 'What's the Matter with Our Apple Dumplings and Hard Sauce?' 'Hot Cakes and Maple Syrup Like You Ate When a Boy,' 'Our Fried Chicken Never Was Heard to Crow'--there was literature doomed to please the digestions of man! I said to myself that mother's wandering boy should munch there that night. And so it came to pass. And there is where I contracted my case of Mame Dugan.

"Old Man Dugan was six feet by one of Indiana loafer, and he spent his time sitting on his shoulder blades in a rocking-chair in the shanty memorialising the great corn-crop failure of '96. Ma Dugan did the cooking, and Mame waited on the table.

"As soon as I saw Mame I knew there was a mistake in the census reports. There wasn't but one girl in the United States. When you come to specifications it isn't easy. She was about the size of an angel, and she had eyes, and ways about her. When you come to the kind of a girl she was, you'll find a belt of 'em reaching from the Brooklyn Bridge west as far as the courthouse in Council Bluffs, Ia. They earn their own living in stores, restaurants, factories, and offices. They're chummy and honest and free and tender and sassy, and they look life straight in the eye. They've met man face to face, and discovered that he's a poor creature. They've dropped to it that the reports in the Seaside Library about his being a fairy prince lack confirmation.

"Mame was that sort. She was full of life and fun, and breezy; she passed the repartee with the boarders quick as a wink; you'd have smothered laughing. I am disinclined to make excavations into the insides of a personal affection. I am glued to the theory that the diversions and discrepancies of the indisposition known as love should be as private a sentiment as a toothbrush. 'Tis my opinion that the biographies of the heart should be confined with the historical romances of the liver to the advertising pages of the magazines. So, you'll excuse the lack of an itemised bill of my feelings toward Mame.

"Pretty soon I got a regular habit of dropping into the tent to eat at irregular times when there wasn't so many around. Mame would sail in with a smile, in a black dress and white apron, and say: 'Hello, Jeff --why don't you come at mealtime? Want to see how much trouble you can be, of course. Friedchickenbeefsteakporkchopshamandeggspotpie'--and so on. She called me Jeff, but there was no significations attached. Designations was all she meant. The front names of any of us she used as they came to hand. I'd eat about two meals before I left, and string 'em out like a society spread where they changed plates and wives, and josh one another festively between bites. Mame stood for it, pleasant, for it wasn't up to her to take any canvas off the tent by declining dollars just because they were whipped in after meal times.

"It wasn't long until there was another fellow named Ed Collier got the between-meals affliction, and him and me put in bridges between breakfast and dinner, and dinner and supper, that made a three-ringed circus of that tent, and Mame's turn as waiter a continuous performance. That Collier man was saturated with designs and contrivings. He was in well-boring or insurance or claim-jumping, or something--I've forgotten which. He was a man well lubricated with

gentility, and his words were such as recommended you to his point of view. So, Collier and me infested the grub tent with care and activity. Mame was level full of impartiality. 'Twas like a casino hand the way she dealt out her favours--one to Collier and one to me and one to the board, and not a card up her sleeve.

"Me and Collier naturally got acquainted, and gravitated together some on the outside. Divested of his stratagems, he seemed to be a pleasant chap, full of an amiable sort of hostility.

"I notice you have an affinity for grubbing in the banquet hall after the guests have fled,' says I to him one day, to draw his conclusions.

""Well, yes,' says Collier, reflecting; 'the tumult of a crowded board seems to harass my sensitive nerves.'

""It exasperates mine some, too,' says I. 'Nice little girl, don't you think?'

"I see,' says Collier, laughing. 'Well, now that you mention it, I have noticed that she doesn't seem to displease the optic nerve.'

""She's a joy to mine,' says I, 'and I'm going after her. Notice is hereby served.'

""I'll be as candid as you,' admits Collier, 'and if the drug stores don't run out of pepsin I'll give you a run for your money that'll leave you a dyspeptic at the wind-up.'

"So Collier and me begins the race; the grub department lays in new supplies; Mame waits on us, jolly and kind and agreeable, and it looks like an even break, with Cupid and the cook working overtime in Dugan's restaurant.

""Twas one night in September when I got Mame to take a walk after supper when the things were all cleared away. We strolled out a distance and sat on a pile of lumber at the edge of town. Such opportunities was seldom, so I spoke my piece, explaining how the Brazilian diamonds and the fire kindler were laying up sufficient treasure to guarantee the happiness of two, and that both of 'em together couldn't equal the light from somebody's eyes, and that the name of Dugan should be changed to Peters, or reasons why not would be in order.

"Mame didn't say anything right away. Directly she gave a kind of shudder, and I began to learn something.

""Jeff,' she says, 'I'm sorry you spoke. I like you as well as any of them, but there isn't a man in the world I'd ever marry, and there

never will be. Do you know what a man is in my eye? He's a tomb. He's a sarcophagus for the interment of Beafsteakporkchopsliver'nbaconham-andeggs. He's that and nothing more. For two years I've watched men eat, eat, eat, until they represent nothing on earth to me but ruminant bipeds. They're absolutely nothing but something that goes in front of a knife and fork and plate at the table. They're fixed that way in my mind and memory. I've tried to overcome it, but I can't. I've heard girls rave about their sweethearts, but I never could understand it. A man and a sausage grinder and a pantry awake in me exactly the same sentiments. I went to a matinee once to see an actor the girls were crazy about. I got interested enough to wonder whether he liked his steak rare, medium, or well done, and his eggs over or straight up. That was all. No, Jeff; I'll marry no man and see him sit at the breakfast table and eat, and come back to dinner and eat, and happen in again at supper to eat, eat, eat.'

"'But, Mame,' says I, 'it'll wear off. You've had too much of it. You'll marry some time, of course. Men don't eat always.'

"'As far as my observation goes, they do. No, I'll tell you what I'm going to do.' Mame turns, sudden, to animation and bright eyes. 'There's a girl named Susie Foster in Terre Haute, a chum of mine. She waits in the railroad eating house there. I worked two years in a restaurant in that town. Susie has it worse than I do, because the men who eat at railroad stations gobble. They try to flirt and gobble at the same time. Whew! Susie and I have it all planned out. We're saving our money, and when we get enough we're going to buy a little cottage and five acres we know of, and live together, and grow violets for the Eastern market. A man better not bring his appetite within a mile of that ranch.'

"'Don't girls ever--' I commenced, but Mame heads me off, sharp.

"'No, they don't. They nibble a little bit sometimes; that's all.'

"'I thought the confect--'

"'For goodness' sake, change the subject,' says Mame.

"'As I said before, that experience puts me wise that the feminine arrangement ever struggles after deceptions and illusions. Take England--beef made her; wieners elevated Germany; Uncle Sam owes his greatness to fried chicken and pie, but the young ladies of the Shetalkyou schools, they'll never believe it. Shakespeare, they allow, and Rubinstein, and the Rough Riders is what did the trick.

"'Twas a situation calculated to disturb. I couldn't bear to give up Mame; and yet it pained me to think of abandoning the practice of eating. I had acquired the habit too early. For twenty-seven years I

had been blindly rushing upon my fate, yielding to the insidious lures of that deadly monster, food. It was too late. I was a ruminant biped for keeps. It was lobster salad to a doughnut that my life was going to be blighted by it.

"I continued to board at the Dugan tent, hoping that Mame would relent. I had sufficient faith in true love to believe that since it has often outlived the absence of a square meal it might, in time, overcome the presence of one. I went on ministering to my fatal vice, although I felt that each time I shoved a potato into my mouth in Mame's presence I might be burying my fondest hopes.

"I think Collier must have spoken to Mame and got the same answer, for one day he orders a cup of coffee and a cracker, and sits nibbling the corner of it like a girl in the parlour, that's filled up in the kitchen, previous, on cold roast and fried cabbage. I caught on and did the same, and maybe we thought we'd made a hit! The next day we tried it again, and out comes old man Dugan fetching in his hands the fairy viands.

"'Kinder off yer feed, ain't ye, gents?' he asks, fatherly and some sardonic. 'Thought I'd spell Mame a bit, seein' the work was light, and my rheumatiz can stand the strain.'

"So back me and Collier had to drop to the heavy grub again. I noticed about that time that I was seized by a most uncommon and devastating appetite. I ate until Mame must have hated to see me darken the door. Afterward I found out that I had been made the victim of the first dark and irreligious trick played on me by Ed Collier. Him and me had been taking drinks together uptown regular, trying to drown our thirst for food. That man had bribed about ten bartenders to always put a big slug of Appletree's Anaconda Appetite Bitters in every one of my drinks. But the last trick he played me was hardest to forget.

"One day Collier failed to show up at the tent. A man told me he left town that morning. My only rival now was the bill of fare. A few days before he left Collier had presented me with a two-gallon jug of fine whisky which he said a cousin had sent him from Kentucky. I now have reason to believe that it contained Appletree's Anaconda Appetite Bitters almost exclusively. I continued to devour tons of provisions. In Mame's eyes I remained a mere biped, more ruminant than ever.

"About a week after Collier pulled his freight there came a kind of side-show to town, and hoisted a tent near the railroad. I judged it was a sort of fake museum and curiosity business. I called to see Mame one night, and Ma Dugan said that she and Thomas, her younger brother, had gone to the show. That same thing happened for three nights that week. Saturday night I caught her on the way coming back, and got to sit on the steps a while and talk to her. I noticed she looked

different. Her eyes were softer, and shiny like. Instead of a Mame Dugan to fly from the voracity of man and raise violets, she seemed to be a Mame more in line as God intended her, approachable, and suited to bask in the light of the Brazilians and the Kindler.

"You seem to be right smart inveigled," says I, 'with the Unparalleled Exhibition of the World's Living Curiosities and Wonders.'

"It's a change," says Mame.

"You'll need another," says I, 'if you keep on going every night.'

"Don't be cross, Jeff," says she; 'it takes my mind off business.'

"Don't the curiosities eat?" I ask.

"Not all of them. Some of them are wax."

"Look out, then, that you don't get stuck," says I, kind of flip and foolish.

Mame blushed. I didn't know what to think about her. My hopes raised some that perhaps my attentions had palliated man's awful crime of visibly introducing nourishment into his system. She talked some about the stars, referring to them with respect and politeness, and I drivelled a quantity about united hearts, homes made bright by true affection, and the Kindler. Mame listened without scorn, and I says to myself, 'Jeff, old man, you're removing the hoodoo that has clung to the consumer of victuals; you're setting your heel upon the serpent that lurks in the gravy bowl.'

"Monday night I drop around. Mame is at the Unparalleled Exhibition with Thomas."

"Now, may the curse of the forty-one seven-sided sea cooks," says I, 'and the bad luck of the nine impenitent grasshoppers rest upon this self-same sideshow at once and forever more. Amen. I'll go to see it myself to-morrow night and investigate its baleful charm. Shall man that was made to inherit the earth be bereft of his sweetheart first by a knife and fork and then by a ten-cent circus?'

The next night before starting out for the exhibition tent I inquire and find out that Mame is not at home. She is not at the circus with Thomas this time, for Thomas waylays me in the grass outside of the grub tent with a scheme of his own before I had time to eat supper.

"What'll you give me, Jeff," says he, 'if I tell you something?'

"The value of it, son,' I says.

"Sis is stuck on a freak,' says Thomas, 'one of the side-show freaks. I don't like him. She does. I overheard 'em talking. Thought maybe you'd like to know. Say, Jeff, does it put you wise two dollars' worth? There's a target rifle up town that--'

"I frisked my pockets and commenced to dribble a stream of halves and quarters into Thomas's hat. The information was of the pile-driver system of news, and it telescoped my intellects for a while. While I was leaking small change and smiling foolish on the outside, and suffering disturbances internally, I was saying, idiotically and pleasantly:

"Thank you, Thomas--thank you--er--a freak, you said, Thomas. Now, could you make out the monstrosity's entitlements a little clearer, if you please, Thomas?"

"This is the fellow,' says Thomas, pulling out a yellow handbill from his pocket and shoving it under my nose. 'He's the Champion Faster of the Universe. I guess that's why Sis got soft on him. He don't eat nothing. He's going to fast forty-nine days. This is the sixth. That's him.'

"I looked at the name Thomas pointed out--'Professor Eduardo Collieri.' 'Ah!' says I, in admiration, 'that's not so bad, Ed Collier. I give you credit for the trick. But I don't give you the girl until she's Mrs. Freak.'

"I hit the sod in the direction of the show. I came up to the rear of the tent, and, as I did so, a man wiggled out like a snake from under the bottom of the canvas, scrambled to his feet, and ran into me like a locoed bronco. I gathered him by the neck and investigated him by the light of the stars. It is Professor Eduardo Collieri, in human habiliments, with a desperate look in one eye and impatience in the other.

"Hello, Curiosity,' says I. 'Get still a minute and let's have a look at your freakship. How do you like being the willopus-wallopus or the bim-bam from Borneo, or whatever name you are denounced by in the side-show business?"

"Jeff Peters,' says Collier, in a weak voice. 'Turn me loose, or I'll slug you one. I'm in the extremest kind of a large hurry. Hands off!'

"Tut, tut, Eddie,' I answers, holding him hard; 'let an old friend gaze on the exhibition of your curiousness. It's an eminent graft you fell onto, my son. But don't speak of assaults and battery, because you're not fit. The best you've got is a lot of nerve and a mighty

empty stomach.' And so it was. The man was as weak as a vegetarian cat.

"'I'd argue this case with you, Jeff,' says he, regretful in his style, 'for an unlimited number of rounds if I had half an hour to train in and a slab of beefsteak two feet square to train with. Curse the man, I say, that invented the art of going foodless. May his soul in eternity be chained up within two feet of a bottomless pit of red-hot hash. I'm abandoning the conflict, Jeff; I'm deserting to the enemy. You'll find Miss Dugan inside contemplating the only living mummy and the informed hog. She's a fine girl, Jeff. I'd have beat you out if I could have kept up the grubless habit a little while longer. You'll have to admit that the fasting dodge was aces-up for a while. I figured it out that way. But say, Jeff, it's said that love makes the world go around. Let me tell you, the announcement lacks verification. It's the wind from the dinner horn that does it. I love that Mame Dugan. I've gone six days without food in order to coincide with her sentiments. Only one bite did I have. That was when I knocked the tattooed man down with a war club and got a sandwich he was gobbling. The manager fined me all my salary; but salary wasn't what I was after. 'Twas that girl. I'd give my life for her, but I'd endanger my immortal soul for a beef stew. Hunger is a horrible thing, Jeff. Love and business and family and religion and art and patriotism are nothing but shadows of words when a man's starving!'

"In such language Ed Collier discoursed to me, pathetic. I gathered the diagnosis that his affections and his digestions had been implicated in a scramble and the commissary had won out. I never disliked Ed Collier. I searched my internal admonitions of suitable etiquette to see if I could find a remark of a consoling nature, but there was none convenient.

"'I'd be glad, now,' says Ed, 'if you'll let me go. I've been hard hit, but I'll hit the ration supply harder. I'm going to clean out every restaurant in town. I'm going to wade waist deep in sirloins and swim in ham and eggs. It's an awful thing, Jeff Peters, for a man to come to this pass--to give up his girl for something to eat--it's worse than that man Esau, that swapped his copyright for a partridge--but then, hunger's a fierce thing. You'll excuse me, now, Jeff, for I smell a pervasion of ham frying in the distance, and my legs are crying out to stampede in that direction.'

"'A hearty meal to you, Ed Collier,' I says to him, 'and no hard feelings. For myself, I am projected to be an unseldom eater, and I have condolence for your predicaments.'

"There was a sudden big whiff of frying ham smell on the breeze; and the Champion Faster gives a snort and gallops off in the dark toward fodder.

"I wish some of the cultured outfit that are always advertising the extenuating circumstances of love and romance had been there to see. There was Ed Collier, a fine man full of contrivances and flirtations, abandoning the girl of his heart and ripping out into the contiguous territory in the pursuit of sordid grub. 'Twas a rebuke to the poets and a slap at the best-paying element of fiction. An empty stomach is a sure antidote to an overfull heart.

"I was naturally anxious to know how far Mame was infatuated with Collier and his stratagems. I went inside the Unparalleled Exhibition, and there she was. She looked surprised to see me, but unguilty.

"'It's an elegant evening outside,' says I. 'The coolness is quite nice and gratifying, and the stars are lined out, first class, up where they belong. Wouldn't you shake these by-products of the animal kingdom long enough to take a walk with a common human who never was on a programme in his life?'

"Mame gave a sort of sly glance around, and I knew what that meant.

"'Oh,' says I, 'I hate to tell you; but the curiosity that lives on wind has flew the coop. He just crawled out under the tent. By this time he has amalgamated himself with half the delicatessen truck in town.'

"'You mean Ed Collier?' says Mame.

"'I do,' I answers; 'and a pity it is that he has gone back to crime again. I met him outside the tent, and he exposed his intentions of devastating the food crop of the world. 'Tis enormously sad when one's ideal descends from his pedestal to make a seventeen-year locust of himself.'

"Mame looked me straight in the eye until she had corkscrewed my reflections.

"'Jeff,' says she, 'it isn't quite like you to talk that way. I don't care to hear Ed Collier ridiculed. A man may do ridiculous things, but they don't look ridiculous to the girl he does 'em for. That was one man in a hundred. He stopped eating just to please me. I'd be hard-hearted and ungrateful if I didn't feel kindly toward him. Could you do what he did?'

"'I know,' says I, seeing the point, 'I'm condemned. I can't help it. The brand of the consumer is upon my brow. Mrs. Eve settled that business for me when she made the dicker with the snake. I fell from the fire into the frying-pan. I guess I'm the Champion Feaster of the Universe.' I spoke humble, and Mame mollified herself a little.

"'Ed Collier and I are good friends,' she said, 'the same as me and you. I gave him the same answer I did you--no marrying for me. I liked to be with Ed and talk with him. There was something mighty pleasant to me in the thought that here was a man who never used a knife and fork, and all for my sake.'

"'Wasn't you in love with him?' I asks, all injudicious. 'Wasn't there a deal on for you to become Mrs. Curiosity?'

"All of us do it sometimes. All of us get jostled out of the line of profitable talk now and then. Mame put on that little lemon /glace/ smile that runs between ice and sugar, and says, much too pleasant: 'You're short on credentials for asking that question, Mr. Peters. Suppose you do a forty-nine day fast, just to give you ground to stand on, and then maybe I'll answer it.'

"So, even after Collier was kidnapped out of the way by the revolt of his appetite, my own prospects with Mame didn't seem to be improved. And then business played out in Guthrie.

"I had stayed too long there. The Brazilians I had sold commenced to show signs of wear, and the Kindler refused to light up right frequent on wet mornings. There is always a time, in my business, when the star of success says, 'Move on to the next town.' I was travelling by wagon at that time so as not to miss any of the small towns; so I hitched up a few days later and went down to tell Mame good-bye. I wasn't abandoning the game; I intended running over to Oklahoma City and work it for a week or two. Then I was coming back to institute fresh proceedings against Mame.

"What do I find at the Dugans' but Mame all conspicuous in a blue travelling dress, with her little trunk at the door. It seems that sister Lottie Bell, who is a typewriter in Terre Haute, is going to be married next Thursday, and Mame is off for a week's visit to be an accomplice at the ceremony. Mame is waiting for a freight wagon that is going to take her to Oklahoma, but I condemns the freight wagon with promptness and scorn, and offers to deliver the goods myself. Ma Dugan sees no reason why not, as Mr. Freightman wants pay for the job; so, thirty minutes later Mame and I pull out in my light spring wagon with white canvas cover, and head due south.

"That morning was of a praiseworthy sort. The breeze was lively, and smelled excellent of flowers and grass, and the little cottontail rabbits entertained themselves with skylarking across the road. My two Kentucky bays went for the horizon until it come sailing in so fast you wanted to dodge it like a clothesline. Mame was full of talk and rattled on like a kid about her old home and her school pranks and the things she liked and the hateful ways of those Johnson girls just

across the street, 'way up in Indiana. Not a word was said about Ed Collier or victuals or such solemn subjects. About noon Mame looks and finds that the lunch she had put up in a basket had been left behind. I could have managed quite a collation, but Mame didn't seem to be grieving over nothing to eat, so I made no lamentations. It was a sore subject with me, and I ruled provender in all its branches out of my conversation.

"I am minded to touch light on explanations how I came to lose the way. The road was dim and well grown with grass; and there was Mame by my side confiscating my intellects and attention. The excuses are good or they are not, as they may appear to you. But I lost it, and at dusk that afternoon, when we should have been in Oklahoma City, we were seesawing along the edge of nowhere in some undiscovered river bottom, and the rain was falling in large, wet bunches. Down there in the swamps we saw a little log house on a small knoll of high ground. The bottom grass and the chaparral and the lonesome timber crowded all around it. It seemed to be a melancholy little house, and you felt sorry for it. 'Twas that house for the night, the way I reasoned it. I explained to Mame, and she leaves it to me to decide. She doesn't become galvanic and prosecuting, as most women would, but she says it's all right; she knows I didn't mean to do it.

"We found the house was deserted. It had two empty rooms. There was a little shed in the yard where beasts had once been kept. In a loft of it was a lot of old hay. I put my horses in there and gave them some of it, for which they looked at me sorrowful, expecting apologies. The rest of the hay I carried into the house by armfuls, with a view to accommodations. I also brought in the patent kindler and the Brazilians, neither of which are guaranteed against the action of water.

"Mame and I sat on the wagon seats on the floor, and I lit a lot of the kindler on the hearth, for the night was chilly. If I was any judge, that girl enjoyed it. It was a change for her. It gave her a different point of view. She laughed and talked, and the kindler made a dim light compared to her eyes. I had a pocketful of cigars, and as far as I was concerned there had never been any fall of man. We were at the same old stand in the Garden of Eden. Out there somewhere in the rain and the dark was the river of Zion, and the angel with the flaming sword had not yet put up the keep-off-the-grass sign. I opened up a gross or two of the Brazilians and made Mame put them on--rings, brooches, necklaces, eardrops, bracelets, girdles, and lockets. She flashed and sparkled like a million-dollar princess until she had pink spots in her cheeks and almost cried for a looking-glass.

"When it got late I made a fine bunk on the floor for Mame with the hay and my lap robes and blankets out of the wagon, and persuaded her to lie down. I sat in the other room burning tobacco and listening to

the pouring rain and meditating on the many vicissitudes that came to a man during the seventy years or so immediately preceding his funeral.

"I must have dozed a little while before morning, for my eyes were shut, and when I opened them it was daylight, and there stood Mame with her hair all done up neat and correct, and her eyes bright with admiration of existence.

"Gee whiz, Jeff!' she exclaims, 'but I'm hungry. I could eat a--'

"I looked up and caught her eye. Her smile went back in and she gave me a cold look of suspicion. Then I laughed, and laid down on the floor to laugh easier. It seemed funny to me. By nature and geniality I am a hearty laugher, and I went the limit. When I came to, Mame was sitting with her back to me, all contaminated with dignity.

"Don't be angry, Mame,' I says, 'for I couldn't help it. It's the funny way you've done up your hair. If you could only see it!'

"You needn't tell stories, sir,' said Mame, cool and advised. 'My hair is all right. I know what you were laughing about. Why, Jeff, look outside,' she winds up, peeping through a chink between the logs. I opened the little wooden window and looked out. The entire river bottom was flooded, and the knob of land on which the house stood was an island in the middle of a rushing stream of yellow water a hundred yards wide. And it was still raining hard. All we could do was to stay there till the doves brought in the olive branch.

"I am bound to admit that conversations and amusements languished during that day. I was aware that Mame was getting a too prolonged one-sided view of things again, but I had no way to change it. Personally, I was wrapped up in the desire to eat. I had hallucinations of hash and visions of ham, and I kept saying to myself all the time, 'What'll you have to eat, Jeff?--what'll you order now, old man, when the waiter comes?' I picks out to myself all sorts of favourites from the bill of fare, and imagines them coming. I guess it's that way with all hungry men. They can't get their cogitations trained on anything but something to eat. It shows that the little table with the broken-legged caster and the imitation Worcester sauce and the napkin covering up the coffee stains is the paramount issue, after all, instead of the question of immortality or peace between nations.

"I sat there, musing along, arguing with myself quite heated as to how I'd have my steak--with mushrooms, or /a la creole/. Mame was on the other seat, pensive, her head leaning on her hand. 'Let the potatoes come home-fried,' I states in my mind, 'and brown the hash in the pan, with nine poached eggs on the side.' I felt, careful, in my own

pockets to see if I could find a peanut or a grain or two of popcorn.

"Night came on again with the river still rising and the rain still falling. I looked at Mame and I noticed that desperate look on her face that a girl always wears when she passes an ice-cream lair. I knew that poor girl was hungry--maybe for the first time in her life. There was that anxious look in her eye that a woman has only when she has missed a meal or feels her skirt coming unfastened in the back.

"It was about eleven o'clock or so on the second night when we sat, gloomy, in our shipwrecked cabin. I kept jerking my mind away from the subject of food, but it kept flopping back again before I could fasten it. I thought of everything good to eat I had ever heard of. I went away back to my kidhood and remembered the hot biscuit sopped in sorghum and bacon gravy with partiality and respect. Then I trailed along up the years, pausing at green apples and salt, flapjacks and maple, lye hominy, fried chicken Old Virginia style, corn on the cob, spareribs and sweet potato pie, and wound up with Georgia Brunswick stew, which is the top notch of good things to eat, because it comprises 'em all.

"They say a drowning man sees a panorama of his whole life pass before him. Well, when a man's starving he sees the ghost of every meal he ever ate set out before him, and he invents new dishes that would make the fortune of a chef. If somebody would collect the last words of men who starved to death, they'd have to sift 'em mighty fine to discover the sentiment, but they'd compile into a cook book that would sell into the millions.

"I guess I must have had my conscience pretty well inflicted with culinary meditations, for, without intending to do so, I says, out loud, to the imaginary waiter, 'Cut it thick and have it rare, with the French fried, and six, soft-scrambled, on toast.'

"Mame turned her head quick as a wing. Her eyes were sparkling and she smiled sudden.

"'Medium for me,' she rattles out, 'with the Juliennes, and three, straight up. Draw one, and brown the wheats, double order to come. Oh, Jeff, wouldn't it be glorious! And then I'd like to have a half fry, and a little chicken curried with rice, and a cup custard with ice cream, and--'

"'Go easy,' I interrupts; 'where's the chicken liver pie, and the kidney /saute/ on toast, and the roast lamb, and--'

"'Oh,' cuts in Mame, all excited, 'with mint sauce, and the turkey salad, and stuffed olives, and raspberry tarts, and--'

"'Keep it going,' says I. 'Hurry up with the fried squash, and the hot corn pone with sweet milk, and don't forget the apple dumpling with hard sauce, and the cross-barred dew-berry pie--'

"Yes, for ten minutes we kept up that kind of restaurant repartee. We ranges up and down and backward and forward over the main trunk lines and the branches of the victual subject, and Mame leads the game, for she is apprised in the ramifications of grub, and the dishes she nominates aggravates my yearnings. It seems that there is a feeling that Mame will line up friendly again with food. It seems that she looks upon the obnoxious science of eating with less contempt than before.

"The next morning we find that the flood has subsided. I geared up the bays, and we splashed out through the mud, some precarious, until we found the road again. We were only a few miles wrong, and in two hours we were in Oklahoma City. The first thing we saw was a big restaurant sign, and we piled into there in a hurry. Here I finds myself sitting with Mame at table, with knives and forks and plates between us, and she not scornful, but smiling with starvation and sweetness.

"'Twas a new restaurant and well stocked. I designated a list of quotations from the bill of fare that made the waiter look out toward the wagon to see how many more might be coming.

"There we were, and there was the order being served. 'Twas a banquet for a dozen, but we felt like a dozen. I looked across the table at Mame and smiled, for I had recollections. Mame was looking at the table like a boy looks at his first stem-winder. Then she looked at me, straight in the face, and two big tears came in her eyes. The waiter was gone after more grub.

"'Jeff,' she says, soft like, 'I've been a foolish girl. I've looked at things from the wrong side. I never felt this way before. Men get hungry every day like this, don't they? They're big and strong, and they do the hard work of the world, and they don't eat just to spite silly waiter girls in restaurants, do they, Jeff? You said once--that is, you asked me--you wanted me to--well, Jeff, if you still care--I'd be glad and willing to have you always sitting across the table from me. Now give me something to eat, quick, please.'

"So, as I've said, a woman needs to change her point of view now and then. They get tired of the same old sights--the same old dinner table, washtub, and sewing machine. Give 'em a touch of the various--a little travel and a little rest, a little tomfoolery along with the tragedies of keeping house, a little petting after the blowing-up, a little upsetting and a little jostling around--and everybody in the game will have chips added to their stack by the play."

The Legend of Knockgrifton

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by T. CROFTON CROCKER.

There was once a poor man who lived in the fertile glen of Aherlow, at the foot of the gloomy Galtee mountains, and he had a great hump on his back: he looked just as if his body had been rolled up and placed upon his shoulders; and his head was pressed down with the weight so much that his chin, when he was sitting, used to rest upon his knees for support. The country people were rather shy of meeting him in any lonesome place, for though, poor creature, he was as harmless and as inoffensive as a newborn infant, yet his deformity was so great that he scarcely appeared to be a human creature, and some ill-minded persons had set strange stories about him afloat. He was said to have a great knowledge of herbs and charms; but certain it was that he had a mighty skilful hand in plaiting straws and rushes into hats and baskets, which was the way he made his livelihood.

Lusmore, for that was the nickname put upon him by reason of his always wearing a sprig of the fairy cap, or lusmore (the foxglove), in his little straw hat, would ever get a higher penny for his plaited work than any one else, and perhaps that was the reason why some one, out of envy, had circulated the strange stories about him. Be that as it may, it happened that he was returning one evening from the pretty town of Cahir towards Cappagh, and as little Lusmore walked very slowly, on account of the great hump upon his back, it was quite dark when he came to the old moat of Knockgrifton, which stood on the right-hand side of his road. Tired and weary was he, and noways comfortable in his own mind at thinking how much farther he had to travel, and that he should be walking all the night; so he sat down under the moat to rest himself, and began looking mournfully enough upon the moon, which--

"Rising in clouded majesty, at length
Apparent Queen, unveil'd her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw."

Presently there rose a wild strain of unearthly melody upon the ear of little Lusmore; he listened, and he thought that he had never heard such ravishing music before. It was like the sound of many voices, each mingling and blending with the other so strangely that they seemed to be one, though all singing different strains, and the words

of the song were these--

Da Luan, Da Mort, Da Luan, Da Mort, Da Luan, Da Mort;

when there would be a moment's pause, and then the round of melody went on again.

Lusmore listened attentively, scarcely drawing his breath lest he might lose the slightest note. He now plainly perceived that the singing was within the moat; and though at first it had charmed him so much, he began to get tired of hearing the same round sung over and over so often without any change; so availing himself of the pause when _Da Luan, Da Mort_, had been sung three times, he took up the tune, and raised it with the words _augus Da Dardeen_, and then went on singing with the voices inside of the moat, _Da Luan, Da Mort_, finishing the melody, when the pause again came, with _augus Da Dardeen_.

The fairies within Knockgraston, for the song was a fairy melody, when they heard this addition to the tune, were so much delighted that, with instant resolve, it was determined to bring the mortal among them, whose musical skill so far exceeded theirs, and little Lusmore was conveyed into their company with the eddying speed of a whirlwind.

Glorious to behold was the sight that burst upon him as he came down through the moat, twirling round and round, with the lightness of a straw, to the sweetest music that kept time to his motion. The greatest honour was then paid him, for he was put above all the musicians, and he had servants tending upon him, and everything to his heart's content, and a hearty welcome to all; and, in short, he was made as much of as if he had been the first man in the land.

Presently Lusmore saw a great consultation going forward among the fairies, and, notwithstanding all their civility, he felt very much frightened, until one stepping out from the rest came up to him and said--

"Lusmore! Lusmore!
Doubt not, nor deplore,
For the hump which you bore
On your back is no more;
Look down on the floor,
And view it, Lusmore!"

When these words were said, poor little Lusmore felt himself so light, and so happy, that he thought he could have bounded at one jump over the moon, like the cow in the history of the cat and the fiddle; and he saw, with inexpressible pleasure, his hump tumble down upon the ground from his shoulders. He then tried to lift up his head, and he did so with becoming caution, fearing that he might knock it against

the ceiling of the grand hall, where he was; he looked round and round again with the greatest wonder and delight upon everything, which appeared more and more beautiful; and, overpowered at beholding such a resplendent scene, his head grew dizzy, and his eyesight became dim. At last he fell into a sound sleep, and when he awoke he found that it was broad daylight, the sun shining brightly, and the birds singing sweetly; and that he was lying just at the foot of the moat of Knockgrifton, with the cows and sheep grazing peaceably round about him. The first thing Lusmore did, after saying his prayers, was to put his hand behind to feel for his hump, but no sign of one was there on his back, and he looked at himself with great pride, for he had now become a well-shaped dapper little fellow, and more than that, found himself in a full suit of new clothes, which he concluded the fairies had made for him.

Towards Cappagh he went, stepping out as lightly, and springing up at every step as if he had been all his life a dancing-master. Not a creature who met Lusmore knew him without his hump, and he had a great work to persuade every one that he was the same man--in truth he was not, so far as the outward appearance went.

Of course it was not long before the story of Lusmore's hump got about, and a great wonder was made of it. Through the country, for miles round, it was the talk of every one, high and low.

One morning, as Lusmore was sitting contented enough at his cabin door, up came an old woman to him, and asked him if he could direct her to Cappagh.

"I need give you no directions, my good woman," said Lusmore, "for this is Cappagh; and whom may you want here?"

"I have come," said the woman, "out of Decie's country, in the county of Waterford, looking after one Lusmore, who, I have heard tell, had his hump taken off by the fairies; for there is a son of a gossip of mine who has got a hump on him that will be his death; and maybe, if he could use the same charm as Lusmore, the hump may be taken off him. And now I have told you the reason of my coming so far: 'tis to find out about this charm, if I can."

Lusmore, who was ever a good-natured little fellow, told the woman all the particulars, how he had raised the tune for the fairies at Knockgrifton, how his hump had been removed from his shoulders, and how he had got a new suit of clothes into the bargain.

The woman thanked him very much, and then went away quite happy and easy in her own mind. When she came back to her gossip's house, in the county of Waterford, she told her everything that Lusmore had said, and they put the little hump-backed man, who was a peevish and cunning

creature from his birth, upon a car, and took him all the way across the country. It was a long journey, but they did not care for that, so the hump was taken from off him; and they brought him, just at nightfall, and left him under the old moat of Knockgrifton.

Jack Madden, for that was the humpy man's name, had not been sitting there long when he heard the tune going on within the moat much sweeter than before; for the fairies were singing it the way Lusmore had settled their music for them, and the song was going on: _Da Luan, Da Mort, Da Luan, Da Mort, Da Luan, Da Mort, augus Da Dardeen_, without ever stopping. Jack Madden, who was in a great hurry to get quit of his hump, never thought of waiting until the fairies had done, or watching for a fit opportunity to raise the tune higher again than Lusmore had; so having heard them sing it over seven times without stopping, out he bawls, never minding the time or the humour of the tune, or how he could bring his words in properly, _augus Da Dardeen, augus Da Hena_, thinking that if one day was good, two were better; and that if Lusmore had one new suit of clothes given him, he should have two.

No sooner had the words passed his lips than he was taken up and whisked into the moat with prodigious force; and the fairies came crowding round about him with great anger, screeching and screaming, and roaring out, "Who spoiled our tune? who spoiled our tune?" and one stepped up to him above all the rest, and said--

"Jack Madden! Jack Madden!
Your words came so bad in
The tune we felt glad in;--
This castle you're had in,
That your life we may sadden;
Here's two humps for Jack Madden!"

And twenty of the strongest fairies brought Lusmore's hump, and put it down upon poor Jack's back, over his own, where it became fixed as firmly as if it was nailed on with twelve-penny nails, by the best carpenter that ever drove one. Out of their castle they then kicked him; and in the morning, when Jack Madden's mother and her gossip came to look after their little man, they found him half dead, lying at the foot of the moat, with the other hump upon his back. Well to be sure, how they did look at each other! but they were afraid to say anything, lest a hump might be put upon their own shoulders. Home they brought the unlucky Jack Madden with them, as downcast in their hearts and their looks as ever two gossips were; and what through the weight of his other hump, and the long journey, he died soon after, leaving, they say, his heavy curse to any one who would go to listen to fairy tunes again.

THE LUFTMENSCH

from: The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Ghetto Comedies*, by Israel Zangwill

I

Leopold Barstein, the sculptor, was sitting in his lonesome studio, brooding blackly over his dead illusions, when the postman brought him a letter in a large, straggling, unknown hand. It began 'Angel of God!'

He laughed bitterly. 'Just when I am at my most diabolical!' He did not at first read the letter, divining in it one of the many begging-letters which were the aftermath of his East-End Zionist period. But he turned over the page to see the name of the Orientally effusive scribe. It was 'Nehemiah Silvermann, Dentist and Restaurateur.' His laughter changed to a more genial note; his sense of humour was still saving. The figure of the restaurateur-dentist sprang to his imagination in marble on a pedestal. In one hand the figure held a cornucopia, in the other a pair of pincers. He read the letter.

'3A, THE MINORIES, E.

'ANGEL OF GOD,

'I have the honour now to ask Your very kind humane merciful cordial nobility to assist me by Your clement philanthropical liberal relief in my very hard troublesome sorrows and worries, on which I suffer violently. I lost all my fortune, and I am ruined by Russia. I am here at present without means and dental practice, and my restaurant is impeded with lack of a few frivolous pounds. I do not know really what to do in my actual very disgraceful mischief. I heard the people saying Your propitious magnanimous beneficent charities are everywhere exceedingly well renowned and considerably gracious. Thus I solicit and supplicate Your good very kind genteel clement humanity by my very humble quite instant request to support me by Your merciful aid, and please to respond me as soon as possible according to Your generous very philanthropy in my urgent extreme immense difficulty.

'Your obedient servant respectfully,
'NEHEMIAH SILVERMANN,
'_Dentist and Restaurateur._'

Such a flood of language carried away the last remnants of Barstein's melancholia; he saw his imagined statue showering adjectives from its cornucopia. 'It is the cry of a dictionary in distress!' he murmured, re-reading the letter with unction.

It pleased his humour to reply in the baldest language. He asked for details of Silvermann's circumstances and sorrows. Had he applied to the Russo-Jewish Fund, which existed to help such refugees from persecution? Did he know Jacobs, the dentist of the neighbouring Mansel Place?

Jacobs had been one of Barstein's fellow-councillors in Zionism, a pragmatic inexhaustible debater in the small back room, and the voluble little man now loomed suddenly large as a possible authority upon his brother-dentist.

By return of post a second eruption descended upon the studio from the 'dictionary in distress.'

'3A, THE MINORIES, E.

'MOST HONOURABLE AND ANGELICAL MR. LEOPOLD BARSTEIN,

'I have the honour now to thank You for Your kind answer of my letter. I did not succeed here by my vital experience in the last of ten years. I got my livelihood a certain time by my dental practice so long there was not a hard violent competition, then I had never any efficacious relief, protection, then I have no relation, then we and the time are changeable too, then without money is impossible to perform any matter, if I had at present in my grieved desperate position £4 for my restaurant, then I were rescued. I do not earn anything, and I must despond at last, I perish here, in Russia I was ruined, please to aid me in Your merciful humanity by something, if I had £15 I could start off from here to go somewhere to look for my daily bread, and if I had £30 so I shall go to Jerusalem because I am convinced by my bitter and sour troubles and shocking tribulations here is nothing to do any more for me. I have not been in the Russo-Jewish fund and do not know it where it is, and if it is in the Jewish shelter of Leman Street so I have no protection, no introduction, no recommendation for it. Poverty has very seldom a few clement humane good people and little friends. The people say Jacobs the dentist of Mansel Place is not a good man, and so it is I tried it for he makes the impossible competition. I ask Your good genteel cordial nobility according to the universal good reputation of Your gracious

goodness to reply me quick by some help now.

'Your obedient Servant respectfully,
'NEHEMIAH SILVERMANN,
'_Dentist and Restaurateur._'

This letter threw a new but not reassuring light upon the situation. Instead of being a victim of the Russian troubles, a recent refugee from massacre and robbery, Nehemiah had already existed in London for ten years, and although he might originally have been ruined by Russia, he had survived his ruin by a decade. His ideas of his future seemed as hazy as his past. Four pounds would be a very present help; he could continue his London career. With fifteen pounds he was ready to start off anywhither. With thirty pounds he would end all his troubles in Jerusalem. Such nebulousness appeared to necessitate a personal visit, and the next day, finding himself in bad form, Barstein angrily bashed in a clay visage, clapped on his hat, and repaired to the Minories. But he looked in vain for either a dentist or a restaurant at No. 3A. It appeared a humble corner residence, trying to edge itself into the important street. At last, after wandering uncertainly up and down, he knocked at the shabby door. A frowsy woman with long earrings opened it staring, and said that the Silvermanns occupied two rooms on her second floor.

'What!' cried Barstein. 'Is he married?'

'I should hope so,' replied the landlady severely. 'He has eleven children at least.'

Barstein mounted the narrow carpetless stairs, and was received by Mrs. Silvermann and her brood with much consternation and ceremony. The family filled the whole front room and overflowed into the back, which appeared to be a sort of kitchen, for Mrs. Silvermann had rushed thence with tucked-up sleeves, and sounds of frying still proceeded from it. But Mr. Silvermann was not at home, the small, faded, bewigged creature told him apologetically. Barstein looked curiously round the room, half expecting indications of dentistry or dining. But he saw only a minimum of broken-down furniture, bottomless cane chairs, a wooden table and a cracked mirror, a hanging shelf heaped with ragged books, and a standing cupboard which obviously turned into a bedstead at night for half the family. But of a dentist's chair there was not even the ruins. His eyes wandered over the broken-backed books--some were indeed 'dictionaries in distress.' He noted a Russo-German and a German-English. Then the sounds of frying penetrated more keenly to his brain.

'You are the cook of the restaurant?' he inquired.

'Restaurant!' echoed the woman resentfully. 'Have I not enough cooking

to do for my own family? And where shall I find money to keep a restaurant?'

'Your husband said----' murmured Barstein, as in guilty confusion.

A squalling from the overflow offspring in the kitchen drew off the mother for a moment, leaving him surrounded by an open-eyed juvenile mob. From the rear he heard smacks, loud whispers and whimperings. Then the poor woman reappeared, bearing what seemed a scrubbing-board. She placed it over one of the caneless chairs, and begged his Excellency to be seated. It was a half holiday at the school, she complained, otherwise her family would be less numerous.

'Where does your husband do his dentistry?' Barstein inquired, seating himself cautiously upon the board.

'Do I know?' said his wife. 'He goes out, he comes in.' At this moment, to Barstein's great satisfaction, he did come in.

'Holy angel!' he cried, rushing at the hem of Barstein's coat, and kissing it reverently. He was a gaunt, melancholy figure, elongated to over six feet, and still further exaggerated by a rusty top-hat of the tallest possible chimneypot, and a threadbare frockcoat of the longest possible tails. At his advent his wife, vastly relieved, shepherded her flock into the kitchen and closed the door, leaving Barstein alone with the long man, who seemed, as he stood gazing at his visitor, positively soaring heavenwards with rapture.

But Barstein inquired brutally: 'Where do you do your dentistry?'

'Never mind me,' replied Nehemiah ecstatically. 'Let me look on you!' And a more passionate worship came into his tranced gaze.

But Barstein, feeling duped, replied sternly: 'Where do you do your dentistry?'

The question seemed to take some moments penetrating through Nehemiah's rapt brain, but at last he replied pathetically: 'And where shall I find achers? In Russia I had my living of it. Here I have no friends.'

The homeliness of his vocabulary amused Barstein. Evidently the dictionary _was_ his fount of inspiration. Without it Niagara was reduced to a trickle. He seemed indeed quite shy of speech, preferring to gaze with large liquid eyes.

'But you _have_ managed to live here for ten years,' Barstein pointed out.

'You see how merciful God is!' Nehemiah rejoined eagerly. 'Never once has He deserted me and my children.'

'But what have you done?' inquired Barstein.

The first shade of reproach came into Nehemiah's eyes.

'Ask sooner what the Almighty has done,' he said.

Barstein felt rebuked. One does not like to lose one's character as a holy angel. 'But your restaurant?' he said. 'Where is that?'

'That is here.'

'Here!' echoed Barstein, staring round again.

'Where else? Here is a wide opening for a _kosher_ restaurant. There are hundreds and hundreds of Greeners lodging all around--poor young men with only a bed or a corner of a room to sleep on. They know not where to go to eat, and my wife, God be thanked, is a knowing cook.'

'Oh, then, your restaurant is only an idea.'

'Naturally--a counsel that I have given myself.'

'But have you enough plates and dishes and tablecloths? Can you afford to buy the food, and to risk it's not being eaten?'

Nehemiah raised his hands to heaven.

'Not being eaten! With a family like mine!'

Barstein laughed in spite of himself. And he was softened by noting how sensitive and artistic were Nehemiah's outspread hands--they might well have wielded the forceps. 'Yes, I dare say that is what will happen,' he said. 'How can you keep a restaurant up two pairs of stairs where no passer-by will ever see it?'

As he spoke, however, he remembered staying in an hotel in Sicily which consisted entirely of one upper room. Perhaps in the Ghetto Sicilian fashions were paralleled.

'I do not fly so high as a restaurant in once,' Nehemiah explained. 'But here is this great empty room. What am I to do with it? At night of course most of us sleep on it, but by daylight it is a waste. Also I receive several Hebrew and Yiddish papers a week from my friends in Russia and America, and one of which I even buy here. When I have read them these likewise are a waste. Therefore have I given myself a counsel, if I would make here a reading-room they should come in the

evenings, many young men who have only a bed or a room-corner to go to, and when once they have learnt to come here it will then be easy to make them to eat and drink. First I will give to them only coffee and cigarettes, but afterwards shall my wife cook them all the Delicatessen of Poland. When our custom will become too large we shall take over Bergman's great fashionable restaurant in the Whitechapel Road. He has already given me the option thereof; it is only two hundred pounds. And if your gentility----

'But I cannot afford two hundred pounds,' interrupted Barstein, alarmed.

'No, no, it is the Almighty who will afford that,' said Nehemiah reassuringly. 'From you I ask nothing.'

'In that case,' replied Barstein drily, 'I must say I consider it an excellent plan. Your idea of building up from small foundations is most sensible--some of the young men may even have toothache--but I do not see where you need me--unless to supply a few papers.'

'Did I not say you were from heaven?' Nehemiah's eyes shone again. 'But I do not require the papers. It is enough for me that your holy feet have stood in my homestead. I thought you might send money. But to come with your own feet! Now I shall be able to tell I have spoken with him face to face!'

Barstein was touched. 'I think you will need a larger table for the reading-room,' he said.

The tall figure shook its tall hat. 'It is only gas that I need for my operations.'

'Gas!' repeated Barstein, astonished. 'Then you propose to continue your dentistry too.'

'It is for the restaurant I need the gas,' elucidated Nehemiah. 'Unless there shall be a cheerful shining here the young men will not come. But the penny gas is all I need.'

'Well, if it costs only a penny----' began Barstein.

'A penny in the slot,' corrected Nehemiah. 'But then there is the meter and the cost of the burners.' He calculated that four pounds would convert the room into a salon of light that would attract all the homeless moths of the neighbourhood.

So this was the four-pound solution, Barstein reflected with his first sense of solid foothold. After all Nehemiah had sustained his surprise visit fairly well--he was obviously no Croesus--and if four pounds

would not only save this swarming family but radiate cheer to the whole neighbourhood--

He sprung open the sovereign-purse that hung on his watch-chain. It contained only three pounds ten. He rummaged his pockets for silver, finding only eight shillings.

'I'm afraid I haven't quite got it!' he murmured.

'As if I couldn't trust you!' cried Nehemiah reproachfully, and as he lifted his long coat-tails to trouser-pocket the money, Barstein saw that he had no waistcoat.

II

About six months later, when Barstein had utterly forgotten the episode, he received another letter whose phraseology instantly recalled everything.

'_To the most Honourable Competent Authentical Illustrious Authority and Universal Celebrious Dignity of the very Famous Sculptor._

'3A, THE MINORIES, E.

'DEAR SIR,

'I have the honour and pleasure now to render the real and sincere gratitude of my very much obliged thanks for Your grand gracious clement sympathical propitious merciful liberal compassionable cordial nobility of your real humane generous benevolent genuine very kind magnanimous philanthropy, which afforded to me a great redemption of my very lamentable desperate necessitous need, wherein I am at present very poor indeed in my total ruination by the cruel cynical Russia, therein is every day a daily tyrannous massacre and assassinate, here is nothing to do any more for me previously, I shall rather go to Bursia than to Russia. I received from Your dear kind amiable amicable goodness recently £4 the same was for me a momental recreateing aid in my actual very indigent paltry miserable calamitous situation wherein I gain now nothing and I only perish here. Even I cannot earn here my daily bread by my perfect scientifick Knowledge of diverse languages, I know the philological neology and archaiology, the best way is for me to go to another country to wit, to Bursia or Turkey. Thus, I solicit and supplicate Your charitable generosity by my very humble and instant request to

make me go away from here as soon as possible according to
Your humane kind merciful clemency.

'Your obedient Servant respectfully,
'NEHEMIAH SILVERMANN,
'_Dentist and Professor of Languages_'

So an Academy of Languages had evolved from the gas, not a restaurant.
Anyhow the dictionary was in distress again. Emigration appeared now
the only salvation.

But where in the world was Bursia? Possibly Persia was meant. But why
Persia? Wherein lay the attraction of that exotic land, and whatever
would Mrs. Silvermann and her overflowing progeny do in Persia?
Nehemiah's original suggestion of Jerusalem had been much more
intelligible. Perhaps it persisted still under the head of Turkey.
Not least characteristic Barstein found Nehemiah's tenacious gloating
over his ancient ruin at the hands of Russia.

For some days the sculptor went about weighed down by Nehemiah's
misfortunes, and the necessity of finding time to journey to the
Minories. But he had an absorbing piece of work, and before he could
tear himself away from it a still more urgent shower of words fell
upon him.

'3A, THE MINORIES, E.

'I have the honour now,' the new letter ran, 'to inquire about
my decided and expecting departure. I must sue by my quite
humble and very instant entreaty Your noble genteel cordial
humanity in my very hard troublous and bitter and sour
vexations and tribulations to effect for my poor position at
least a private anonymous prompt collection as soon as
possible according to Your clement magnanimous charitable
mercy of £15 if not £25 among Your very estimable and
respectfully good friends, in good order to go in another
country even Bursia to get my livelihood by my dental practice
or by my other scientifick and philological knowledge. The
great competition is here in anything very vigorous. I have
here no dental employment, no dental practice, no relations,
no relief, no gain, no earning, no introduction, no
protection, no recommendation, no money, no good friends, no
good connecting acquaintance, in Russia I am ruined and I
perish here, I am already desperate and despond entirely. I do
not know what to do and what shall I do, do now in my actual
urgent, extreme immense need. I am told by good many people,
that the board of guardians is very seldom to rescue by aid
the people, but very often is to find only faults, and vices

and to make them guilty. I have nothing to do there, and in the russian jewish fund I found once Sir Asher Aaronsberg and he is not to me sympathial. I supply and solicit considerably Your kind humane clement mercy to answer me as soon as possible quick according to Your very gracious mercy.

'Your obedient Servant respectfully,
'NEHEMIAH SILVERMANN,
'_Dentist and Professor of Languages._'

As soon as the light failed in his studio, Barstein summoned a hansom and sped to the Minorities.

III

Nehemiah's voice bade him walk in, and turning the door-handle he saw the top-hatted figure sprawled in solitary gloom along a caneless chair, reading a newspaper by the twinkle of a rushlight. Nehemiah sprang up with a bark of joy, making his gigantic shadow bow to the visitor. From chimney-pot to coat-tail he stretched unchanged, and the same celestial rapture illumined his gaunt visage.

But Barstein drew back his own coat-tail from the attempted kiss.

'Where is the gas?' he asked drily.

'Alas, the company removed the meter.'

'But the gas-brackets?'

'What else had we to eat?' said Nehemiah simply.

Barstein in sudden suspicion raised his eyes to the ceiling. But a fragment of gaspipe certainly came through it. He could not, however, recall whether the pipe had been there before or not.

'So the young men would not come?' he said.

'Oh yes, they came, and they read, and they ate. Only they did not pay.'

'You should have made it a rule--cash down.'

Again a fine shade of rebuke and astonishment crossed his lean and melancholy visage.

'And could I oppress a brother-in-Israel? Where had those young men to turn but to me?'

Again Barstein felt his angelic reputation imperilled. He hastened to change the conversation.

'And why do you want to go to Bursia?' he said.

'Why shall I want to go to Bursia?' Nehemiah replied.

'You said so.' Barstein showed him the letter.

'Ah, I said I shall sooner go to Bursia than to Russia. Always Sir Asher Aaronsberg speaks of sending us back to Russia.'

'He would,' said Barstein grimly. 'But where is Bursia?'

Nehemiah shrugged his shoulders. 'Shall I know? My little Rebecca was drawing a map thereof; she won a prize of five pounds with which we lived two months. A genial child is my Rebecca.'

'Ah, then, the Almighty did send you something.'

'And do I not trust Him?' said Nehemiah fervently. 'Otherwise, burdened down as I am with a multitude of children----'

'You made your own burden,' Barstein could not help pointing out.

Again that look of pain, as if Nehemiah had caught sight of feet of clay beneath Barstein's shining boots.

""Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,"" Nehemiah quoted in Hebrew. 'Is not that the very first commandment in the Bible?'

'Well, then, you want to go to Turkey,' said the sculptor evasively. 'I suppose you mean Palestine?'

'No, Turkey. It is to Turkey we Zionists should ought to go, there to work for Palestine. Are not many of the Sultan's own officials Jews? If we can make of them hot-hearted Zionists----'

It was an arresting conception, and Barstein found himself sitting on the table to discuss it. The reverence with which Nehemiah listened to his views was touching and disconcerting. Barstein felt humbled by the celestial figure he cut in Nehemiah's mental mirror. Yet he could not suspect the man of a glozing tongue, for of the leaders of Zionism Nehemiah spoke with, if possible, greater veneration, with an awe trembling on tears. His elongated figure grew even gaunter, his lean visage unearthlier, as he unfolded his plan for the conquest of Palestine, and Barstein's original impression of his simple sincerity was repeated and re-enforced.

Presently, however, it occurred to Barstein that Nehemiah himself would have scant opportunity of influential contact with Ottoman officials, and that the real question at issue was, how Nehemiah, his wife, and his 'at least eleven children,' were to be supported in Turkey. He mentioned the point.

Nehemiah waved it away. 'And cannot the Almighty support us in Turkey as well as in England?' he asked. 'Yes, even in Bursia itself the Guardian of Israel is not sleepy.'

It was then that the word 'Luftmensch' flew into Barstein's mind. Nehemiah was not an earth-man in gross contact with solidities. He was an air-man, floating on facile wings through the æther. True, he spoke of troublesome tribulations, but these were mainly dictionary distresses, felt most keenly in the rhapsody of literary composition. At worst they were mere clouds on the blue. They had nothing in common with the fogs which frequently veiled heaven from his own vision. Never for a moment had Nehemiah failed to remember the blue, never had he lost his radiant outlook. His very pessimism was merely optimism in disguise, since it was only a personal pessimism to be remedied by 'a few frivolous pounds,' by a new crumb from the hand of Providence, not that impersonal despair of the scheme of things which gave the thinker such black moments. How had Nehemiah lived during those first ten years in England? Who should say? But he had had the wild daring to uproot himself from his childhood's home and adventure himself upon an unknown shore, and there, by hook or crook, for better or for worse, through vicissitudes innumerable and crises beyond calculation, ever on the perilous verge of nothingness, he had scraped through the days and the weeks and the years, fearlessly contributing perhaps more important items to posterity than the dead stones, which were all he, the sculptor, bade fair to leave behind him. Welcoming each new child with feasting and psalmody, never for a moment had Nehemiah lost his robustious faith in life, his belief in God, man, or himself.

Yes, even deeper than his own self-respect was his respect for others. An impenetrable idealist, he lived surrounded by a radiant humanity, by men become as Gods. With no conscious hyperbole did he address one as 'Angel.' Intellect and goodness were his pole-stars. And what airy courage in his mundane affairs, what invincible resilience! He had once been a dentist, and he still considered himself one. Before he owned a tablecloth he deemed himself the proprietor of a restaurant. He enjoyed alike the pleasures of anticipation and of memory, and having nothing, glided ever buoyantly between two gilded horizons. The superficial might call him shiftless, but more profoundly envisaged, was he not rather an education in the art of living? Did he not incarnate the great Jewish gospel of the improvident lilies?

'You shall not go to Bursia,' said Barstein in a burst of artistic fervour. 'Thirteen people cannot possibly get there for fifteen pounds or even twenty-five pounds, and for such a sum you could start a small business here.'

Nehemiah stared at him. 'God's messenger!' was all he could gasp. Then the tall melancholy man raised his eyes to heaven, and uttered a Hebrew voluntary in which references to the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket to save Isaac's life were distinctly audible.

Barstein waited patiently till the pious lips were at rest.

'But what business do you think you----?' he began.

'Shall I presume dictation to the angel?' asked Nehemiah with wet shining eyes.

'I am thinking that perhaps we might find something in which your children could help you. How old is the eldest?'

'I will ask my wife. Salome!' he cried. The dismal creature trotted in.

'How old is Moshelé?' he asked.

'And don't you remember he was twelve last Tabernacles?'

Nehemiah threw up his long arms. 'Merciful Heaven! He must soon begin to learn his _Parshah_ (confirmation portion). What will it be? Where is my _Chumash_ (Pentateuch)?' Mrs. Silvermann drew it down from the row of ragged books, and Nehemiah, fluttering the pages and bending over the rushlight, became lost to the problem of his future.

Barstein addressed himself to the wife. 'What business do you think your husband could set up here?'

'Is he not a dentist?' she inquired in reply.

Barstein turned to the busy peering flutterer.

'Would you like to be a dentist again?'

'Ah, but how shall I find achers?'

'You put up a sign,' said Barstein. 'One of those cases of teeth. I daresay the landlady will permit you to put it up by the front door, especially if you take an extra room. I will buy you the instruments, furnish the room attractively. You will put in your newspapers--why, people will be glad to come as to a reading-room!' he added smiling.

Nehemiah addressed his wife. 'Did I not say he was a genteel archangel?' he cried ecstatically.

IV

Barstein was sitting outside a café in Rome sipping vermouth with Rozenoffski, the Russo-Jewish pianist, and Schneemann the Galician-Jewish painter, when he next heard from Nehemiah.

He was anxiously expecting an important letter, which he had instructed his studio-assistant to bring to him instantly. So when the man appeared, he seized with avidity upon the envelope in his hand. But the scrawling superscription at once dispelled his hope, and recalled the forgotten Luftmensch. He threw the letter impatiently on the table.

'Oh, you may read it,' his friends protested, misunderstanding.

'I can guess what it is,' he said grumpily. Here, in this classical atmosphere, in this southern sunshine, he felt out of sympathy with the gaunt godly Nehemiah, who had doubtless lapsed again into his truly troublesome tribulations. Not a penny more for the ne'er-do-well! Let his Providence look after him!

'Is she beautiful?' quizzed Schneemann.

Barstein roared with laughter. His irate mood was broken up. Nehemiah as a petticoated romance was too tickling.

'You shall read the letter,' he said.

Schneemann protested comically. 'No, no, that would be ungentlemanly--you read to us what the angel says.'

'It is I that am the angel,' Barstein laughed, as he tore open the letter. He read it aloud, breaking down in almost hysterical laughter at each eruption of adjectives from 'the dictionary in distress.' Rozenoffski and Schneemann rolled in similar spasms of mirth, and the Italians at the neighbouring tables, though entirely ignorant of the motive of the merriment, caught the contagion, and rocked and shrieked with the mad foreigners.

'3A, THE MINORIES, E.

'RIGHT HONOURABLE ANGELICAL MR. LEOPOLD BARSTEIN,

'I have now the honour to again solicit Your genteel genuine sympathetical humane philanthropic kind cordial nobility to oblige me at present by Your merciful loan of gracious second and propitious favourable aidance in my actually poor indigent position in which I have no earn by my dental practice likewise no help, also no protection, no recommendation, no employment, and then the competition is here very violent. I was ruined by Russia, and I have nothing for the celebration of our Jewish new year. Consequentially upon your merciful archangelical donative I was able to make my livelihood by my dental practice even very difficult, but still I had my vital subsistence by it till up now, but not further for the little while, in consequence of it my circumstances are now in the urgent extreme immense need. Thus I implore Your competent, well famous good-hearted liberal magnanimous benevolent generosity to respond me in Your beneficent relief as soon as possible, according to Your kind grand clemence of Your good ingenuous genteel humanity. I wish You a happy new year.

'Your obedient servant respectfully,
'NEHEMIAH SILVERMANN,
'_Dentist and Professor of Languages_.'

But when the reading was finished, Schneemann's comment was unexpected.

'_Rosh Hashanah_ so near?' he said.

A rush of Ghetto memories swamped the three artists as they tried to work out the date of the Jewish New Year, that solemn period of earthly trumpets and celestial judgments.

'Why, it must be to-day!' cried Rozenoffski suddenly. The trio looked at one another with rueful humour. Why, the Ghetto could not even realize such indifference to the heavenly tribunals so busily decreeing their life-or-death sentences!

Barstein raised his glass. 'Here's a happy new year, anyhow!' he said.

The three men clinked glasses.

Rozenoffski drew out a hundred-lire note.

'Send that to the poor devil,' he said.

'Oho!' laughed Schneemann. 'You still believe "Charity delivers from death!" Well, I must be saved too!' And he threw down another hundred-lire note.

To the acutely analytical Barstein it seemed as if an old superstitious thrill lay behind Schneemann's laughter as behind Rozenoffski's donation.

'You will only make the _Luftmensch_ believe still more obstinately in his Providence,' he said, as he gathered up the New Year gifts. 'Again will he declare that he has been accorded a good writing and a good sealing by the Heavenly Tribunal!'

'Well, hasn't he?' laughed Schneemann.

'Perhaps he has,' said Rozenoffski musingly. '_Qui sa?_'

THE BURNING OF THE WORLD

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Myths and Legends of British North America*, by Katharine Berry Judson

Cree Legend

Once all the world was burned. Only a man and his mother and his sister were saved. Before the fire there were many people on earth. Then the young man fell out with his father, and they became enemies. The young man had heard that all the world was to be burned, but his father did not believe it.

Now the young man made a bow and arrows. He shot one arrow to the west, and one to the east, and one to the north, and one to the south. The places where the arrows fell were the four corners of a bit of ground which would not burn. The young man told everybody who wanted to be saved from the fire to come onto that square of land. Many did not believe the world would be burned, so they would not come.

After a while the fire came. They could hear it. They were encamped by the side of a big lake. By and by all the birds and animals came running to that bit of ground marked out by the arrows. The old man had quarreled with his son, so he would not come. The fire was very hot. All the water boiled because it was so hot.

After a while the fire was put out, and the water had settled down. Everything had to be started over again.

Now there were many animals on this patch of ground, and the man named some of them and told them what to do.

He put Beaver in the water, but Rabbit wanted to live in the water. The man said, "No." Then Rabbit jumped into the water and the man had to pull him out. He said to Rabbit, "Your legs are too long. Even if you do eat willow like Beaver, you don't go about in the water properly."

Squirrel wanted to be Bear. He did all he could to be Bear. He argued and chattered a great deal about it. The man said, "Oh, you're too noisy. You wouldn't be a good Bear." He said also, "If you are Bear, you are so noisy that when people come again, they will kill too many of you. A bear must keep quiet. He has many enemies." Then Squirrel began to weep. He wept until his eyes were white. Even today Squirrel has eyes bright and swollen from weeping.

The man made Bear then, because he was nice and wise and quiet.

Somebody wanted to be Caribou--nobody remembers just who wanted that. Then Deer was made, and made so swift that he could outrun all pursuers.

After the man had finished making all the animals, he put a mark on them, so people would know what they were.

Then the man had to give all the people new names. His mother he called Robin, because she was friendly. His sister he called Golden-winged Woodpecker, because she was beautiful. He called himself Blackbird because he would only come every spring.

The Little Fisher-Maiden

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Little Almond Blossoms*, by Jessie Juliet Knox

Lo Luen was the little daughter of a poor Chinese fisherman, and lived in the Chinatown of Monterey, California. She was born in this beautiful country, and did not know anything about China, except what she had heard her parents say. But this country was good enough for her, she thought, with its endless skies of blue overhead, and the big noisy ocean dashing its white spray up on the silver sands right in front of the little hut she called home.

It was a very poor place, and they were very poor people, but Lo Luen did not know this, because it was all she had ever known, so it did not disturb her simple celestial mind in the least. Then she could not get lonely, for there was her small brother, Lo Duck, who was the cunningest, chubbiest little boy that she had ever seen.

Mo chun was very busy always, in the little hut, as she was a cigarette-maker, and worked at this all the time she was not doing the cooking, and making the simple garments for the family.

The father dearly loved his children, and often called Lo Luen his little fisher-maiden. This was because she was such a help to him in his fishing. She and little Lo Duck would sit out on the ground in front of their home for hours at a time, putting bait on the hooks; and this was a great help, for it saved so much time.

He would cut up a great deal of fish into small bits, and put it in a box by the children, and they would fasten it on to the hundreds of hooks on the lines, and then the big round baskets would be all ready for _ho chun_ to cast the lines into the ocean, and draw out the beautiful fish. Lo Luen was very proud when she saw the fine fish in the boat every day, for she almost felt as if she herself had caught them, since she had put the bait on the hooks. One day she had been working so hard that her father looked at her, as she sat there in the sun with her sleeves rolled up, working away as if her life depended upon it, and he said to her: "Lo Luen, how you likee go out in big boat with _ho chun_?"

"Oh!" she shouted, as she clapped her little brown hands, "I likee velly much; I likee catch big fish to bling _mo chun_."

"All light," said her father. "We no takee _hai tong_ (baby); he stay with _mo chun_, he too little."

Lo Duck objected to this; he wanted to go too, but he would only be in the way, and then his mother would be worried if he went, so he was taken into the house, screaming vigorously. The timid mother felt rather afraid to trust her little daughter out on the great noisy ocean, whose waves came dashing upon the rocks with a boom like thunder; but the father said she was a big girl now, and it was time she learned something of the sea. So, while he fitted up the boat and got the nets into it, _mo chun_ was dressing the little girl in her warmest blouse, all heavily padded, and then got out a very thick silk hood, fastening it securely on her head, and last of all, she took from the padded _mumboo_ (tea-pot holder) a pot of boiling tea, and gave it to Lo Luen.

“_Maskee-maskee_, my _samen jai_” (never mind, my little boy), she said to the baby brother, “maybe you go next time.”

Mo chun and the baby boy went with them as far as the boat, and Lo Luen jumped in gaily, and they were off. The water was smooth to-day, and everything would surely be well, thought the mother. She went in and placed a little bowl of steaming rice before the joss, so that he would protect her little girl from the wrath of the mighty ocean, and lighted the punks before him, so that the incense filled the little room.

Meanwhile, the little fishing boat went dancing over the blue waves, as light as an egg-shell, and the little Chinese girl was happy.

They kept near the shore at first, and when they passed the Del Monte hotel she saw hundreds of little American children running on the beach. She loved to watch them, as they ran with bare feet, kicking up the white sand. Some of them were jumping rope with long strands of kelp; some were hunting shells and bits of sea-moss; some were running into the foamy surf, filling their bright tin pails with water, and then hurrying from the big waves they would run back to pour the water into some little place in the sand, where they were building all sorts of wonderful things.

Some of the little girls had the most wonderful dolls in their arms,--or at least they seemed wonderful to a little girl who had no doll, except just the hard kelp balls which she had dressed up and used for dolls, as she did not like to ask for one, for fear it would cost too much.

They left the shore now, and went farther out, where the ocean was deep and the waves were rough. The cool salt spray dashed in her face, and her long queue hung over the side of the boat and dipped into the water. _Ho chun_ told her to take it in, or a big fish might come along and pull her in. Oh, what fun it was to see him cast in the net, and pull out so many big fish! but she was a little afraid of them, they were so squirmy and floppy. She cuddled up in one end of the boat, so they could not jump on her, but _ho chun_ fixed a plank in front of her, so she was not afraid.

It was her turn now, and so the father produced a stout little fishing pole and tackle, and she tried her luck at fishing in the big ocean. Soon she felt a strong tug at her line,--so strong that it almost pulled her in. She tugged away, though, till she almost fell out of the boat, but it was too big for her; she could not manage it without the help of _ho chun_.

“_Maskee!_” he said, and took hold of the pole. She still kept her small hands on it, though, so she could say that she caught it. Pretty soon there came up out of the water a big, big salmon, all gold and sparkling in the sunlight. She just squealed with delight, and her father said: “Heap good girl; catchee velly big fish.”

They were so interested in the work and were having such fine luck that they did not realize how late it was getting. Lo Luen was enjoying it so, that her father could not bear to stop her pleasure.

The darkness fell upon the waters now, and the sea moaned sadly. The waves grew rougher, and the air colder. It was not pretty when the sun was not shining on it.

“The wateh too black now; I no likee; I want see _mo chun_,” falteringly said the little one.

They could see the dim outlines of great ships with their lights sending long, narrow rays across the dark of the ocean. They looked like stars, and made one feel as if they were not alone on the vast waters.

“We go home now--see _mo chun_; get nice hot _tea_,” said the father, in a kind tone, as he clasped the little figure closely to him, and started to row home. Of course Lo Luen did not really feel afraid, with her father so near, and said: “I no ’flaid; but I likee go fast. I cold and hungry--that’s all.”

Her father smiled in the dark as he murmured consolingly, “Yes--that’s all.”

Lo Luen was thinking, as she crouched there, nestled up against _ho chun_, “How pletty those dolls were; I be so happy if I had one--just one, foh my velly own.”

The moonbeams lit up the water in a silvery path, and as Lo Luen looked at this path and thought how very beautiful it was, she noticed something floating in the light and bounding up and down on the waves. It looked like a big lump of seaweed.

“What is that, _ho chun_?” she said, with childish curiosity.

“Oh, I think just a piece of wood or a bunch of kelp; you likee get it, little girl?”

“Yes, we see what it is,” she said.

It seemed determined to get away from them, for almost every time they were near enough to touch it a big wave would come, and take it away in the dark, and it would be lost to sight for a while. But soon the light revealed it right within reach. _Ho chun_ put out his hand and grasped it, and putting it on the fish said: “We see when we get home,” and rowed away as fast as he could.

At home the little mother was getting very uneasy. What could keep them so long? “_Cheung kan ye lok_” (it is getting very late), she said. Oh, why had she ever let her go? To think of her _pao chu_ (precious pearl) being out on the big ocean at night. She imagined all sorts of horrible things, and blamed herself. Perhaps she had not set enough food before the joss, nor burned enough incense. She had the tea all nice and hot, and knew if nothing had happened they would be very hungry when they reached home. So she lighted more punks before the god, and had already sung the baby’s little Chinese song:

“My little baby--little boy blue--
Is as sweet as sugar and cinnamon too;
Isn’t this precious darling of ours
Sweeter than dates and cinnamon flowers?”

He now lay asleep on his couch, and she was all alone.

After what seemed an age to her she heard the sound of a boat being dragged upon the sand, and ran to the door of the hut, and stood there looking out upon the beach. “Lo Luen! Lo Luen!” she called out in the darkness, “_Yap loi le!_” (come in!) and there was a rush of sandalled feet, and in just a moment two cold brown hands were clasped in her warm ones, and a dear little cold nose was pressed against her face. “Lo Luen, precious pearl, you have come back, and the joss is good,” she said.

After the fish were put away _ho chun_ came in, and everything was peace and happiness again. The warm room seemed more welcome than ever before, for they were benumbed with cold, and oh, so hungry! _Mo chun_, with all gentleness and love, soon had them seated, with bowls of steaming rice before them, and fried fish, and other good things which she had prepared in their absence.

After supper Lo Luen happened to think of the mysterious bundle of seaweed, and _ho chun_ went out and brought it in. It was very wet, and smelled of the sea.

"I guess it's only a piece of wood with kelp on," said _mo chun_; but anyway, they tore the wet seaweed from it, while Lo Luen looked eagerly on. What could that be sticking out of the weed? It looked--it actually looked like a doll's foot. It couldn't be, and yet--With a great cry of joy Lo Luen saw her father uncover the treasure. All the pent-up feeling of starved child-life was in her cry, for there, disclosed to her dancing, oblique eyes was a doll--a real one, and a very beautiful one. She could not believe it at first, but rubbed her eyes. They were all astonished, for this was indeed an event in their barren lives.

The doll opened her eyes as if she were alive, and seemed to gaze at them in gratitude for being saved from the cruel water. Lo Luen hugged it to her wildly beating heart and her face beamed with a rapturous joy the like of which had never before come to her. She was such a little mother, always, and now she would have something upon which to shower all the wealth of love repressed in her warm little heart.

They did not attempt to solve the mystery. To them it was enough that this beautiful toy had been sent to them from the waters. It may have been that the doll was lost in some shipwreck, or that some of the little maidens at Del Monte had left it too near the water, and the waves had carried it away. It belonged now to the little Chinese fisher-maiden, and that was enough to know.

She slept that night with the precious doll in her arms--dear little Lo Luen!

THE UNKNOWN

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Maupassant Original Short Stories (180)*,
Complete, by Guy de Maupassant

We were speaking of adventures, and each one of us was relating his story of delightful experiences, surprising meetings, on the train, in a hotel, at the seashore. According to Roger des Annettes, the seashore was particularly favorable to the little blind god.

Gontran, who was keeping mum, was asked what he thought of it.

"I guess Paris is about the best place for that," he said. "Woman is like a precious trinket, we appreciate her all the more when we meet her in the most unexpected places; but the rarest ones are only to be found in Paris."

He was silent for a moment, and then continued:

"By Jove, it's great! Walk along the streets on some spring morning. The little women, daintily tripping along, seem to blossom out like flowers. What a delightful, charming sight! The dainty perfume of violet is everywhere. The city is gay, and everybody notices the women. By Jove, how tempting they are in their light, thin dresses, which occasionally give one a glimpse of the delicate pink flesh beneath!

"One saunters along, head up, mind alert, and eyes open. I tell you it's great! You see her in the distance, while still a block away; you already know that she is going to please you at closer quarters. You can recognize her by the flower on her hat, the toss of her head, or her gait. She approaches, and you say to yourself: 'Look out, here she is!' You come closer to her and you devour her with your eyes.

"Is it a young girl running errands for some store, a young woman returning from church, or hastening to see her lover? What do you care? Her well-rounded bosom shows through the thin waist. Oh, if you could only take her in your arms and fondle and kiss her! Her glance may be timid or bold, her hair light or dark. What difference does it make? She brushes against you, and a cold shiver runs down your spine. Ah, how you wish for her all day! How many of these dear creatures have I met this way, and how wildly in love I would have been had I known them more intimately.

"Have you ever noticed that the ones we would love the most distractedly are those whom we never meet to know? Curious, isn't it? From time to time we barely catch a glimpse of some woman, the mere sight of whom

thrills our senses. But it goes no further. When I think of all the adorable creatures that I have elbowed in the streets of Paris, I fairly rave. Who are they! Where are they? Where can I find them again? There is a proverb which says that happiness often passes our way; I am sure that I have often passed alongside the one who could have caught me like a linnet in the snare of her fresh beauty."

Roger des Annettes had listened smilingly. He answered: "I know that as well as you do. This is what happened to me: About five years ago, for the first time I met, on the Pont de la Concorde, a young woman who made a wonderful impression on me. She was dark, rather stout, with glossy hair, and eyebrows which nearly met above two dark eyes. On her lip was a scarcely perceptible down, which made one dream-dream as one dreams of beloved woods, on seeing a bunch of wild violets. She had a small waist and a well-developed bust, which seemed to present a challenge, offer a temptation. Her eyes were like two black spots on white enamel. Her glance was strange, vacant, unthinking, and yet wonderfully beautiful.

"I imagined that she might be a Jewess. I followed her, and then turned round to look at her, as did many others. She walked with a swinging gait that was not graceful, but somehow attracted one. At the Place de la Concorde she took a carriage, and I stood there like a fool, moved by the strongest desire that had ever assailed me.

"For about three weeks I thought only of her; and then her memory passed out of my mind.

"Six months later I descried her in the Rue de la Paix again. On seeing her I felt the same shock that one experiences on seeing a once dearly loved woman. I stopped that I might better observe her. When she passed close enough to touch me I felt as though I were standing before a red hot furnace. Then, when she had passed by, I noticed a delicious sensation, as of a cooling breeze blowing over my face. I did not follow her. I was afraid of doing something foolish. I was afraid of myself.

"She haunted all my dreams.

"It was a year before I saw her again. But just as the sun was going down on one beautiful evening in May I recognized her walking along the Avenue des Champs-Elysees. The Arc de Triomphe stood out in bold relief against the fiery glow of the sky. A golden haze filled the air; it was one of those delightful spring evenings which are the glory of Paris.

"I followed her, tormented by a desire to address her, to kneel before her, to pour forth the emotion which was choking me. Twice I passed by her only to fall back, and each time as I passed by I felt this sensation, as of scorching heat, which I had noticed in the Rue de la Paix.

"She glanced at me, and then I saw her enter a house on the Rue de

Presbourg. I waited for her two hours and she did not come out. Then I decided to question the janitor. He seemed not to understand me. 'She must be visiting some one,' he said.

"The next time I was eight months without seeing her. But one freezing morning in January, I was walking along the Boulevard Malesherbes at a dog trot, so as to keep warm, when at the corner I bumped into a woman and knocked a small package out of her hand. I tried to apologize. It was she!

"At first I stood stock still from the shock; then having returned to her the package which she had dropped, I said abruptly:

"I am both grieved and delighted, madame, to have jostled you. For more than two years I have known you, admired you, and had the most ardent wish to be presented to you; nevertheless I have been unable to find out who you are, or where you live. Please excuse these foolish words. Attribute them to a passionate desire to be numbered among your acquaintances. Such sentiments can surely offend you in no way! You do not know me. My name is Baron Roger des Annettes. Make inquiries about me, and you will find that I am a gentleman. Now, if you refuse my request, you will throw me into abject misery. Please be good to me and tell me how I can see you.'

"She looked at me with her strange vacant stare, and answered smilingly:

"Give me your address. I will come and see you.'

"I was so dumfounded that I must have shown my surprise. But I quickly gathered my wits together and gave her a visiting card, which she slipped into her pocket with a quick, deft movement.

"Becoming bolder, I stammered:

"When shall I see you again?"

"She hesitated, as though mentally running over her list of engagements, and then murmured:

"Will Sunday morning suit you?"

"I should say it would!"

"She went on, after having stared at me, judged, weighed and analyzed me with this heavy and vacant gaze which seemed to leave a quieting and deadening impression on the person towards whom it was directed.

"Until Sunday my mind was occupied day and night trying to guess who she might be and planning my course of conduct towards her. I finally decided

to buy her a jewel, a beautiful little jewel, which I placed in its box on the mantelpiece, and left it there awaiting her arrival.

"I spent a restless night waiting for her.

"At ten o'clock she came, calm and quiet, and with her hand outstretched, as though she had known me for years. Drawing up a chair, I took her hat and coat and furs, and laid them aside. And then, timidly, I took her hand in mine; after that all went on without a hitch.

"Ah, my friends! what a bliss it is, to stand at a discreet distance and watch the hidden pink and blue ribbons, partly concealed, to observe the hazy lines of the beloved one's form, as they become visible through the last of the filmy garments! What a delight it is to watch the ostrich-like modesty of those who are in reality none too modest. And what is so pretty as their motions!

"Her back was turned towards me, and suddenly, my eyes were irresistibly drawn to a large black spot right between her shoulders. What could it be? Were my eyes deceiving me? But no, there it was, staring me in the face! Then my mind reverted to the faint down on her lip, the heavy eyebrows almost meeting over her coal-black eyes, her glossy black hair --I should have been prepared for some surprise.

"Nevertheless I was dumfounded, and my mind was haunted by dim visions of strange adventures. I seemed to see before me one of the evil genii of the Thousand and One Nights, one of these dangerous and crafty creatures whose mission it is to drag men down to unknown depths. I thought of Solomon, who made the Queen of Sheba walk on a mirror that he might be sure that her feet were not cloven.

"And when the time came for me to sing of love to her, my voice forsook me. At first she showed surprise, which soon turned to anger; and she said, quickly putting on her wraps:

""It was hardly worth while for me to go out of my way to come here.'

"I wanted her to accept the ring which I had bought for her, but she replied haughtily: 'For whom do you take me, sir?' I blushed to the roots of my hair. She left without saying another word.

"There is my whole adventure. But the worst part of it is that I am now madly in love with her. I can't see a woman without thinking of her. All the others disgust me, unless they remind me of her. I cannot kiss a woman without seeing her face before me, and without suffering the torture of unsatisfied desire. She is always with me, always there, dressed or nude, my true love. She is there, beside the other one, visible but intangible. I am almost willing to believe that she was bewitched, and carried a talisman between her shoulders.

"Who is she? I don't know yet. I have met her once or twice since. I bowed, but she pretended not to recognize me. Who is she? An Oriental? Yes, doubtless an oriental Jewess! I believe that she must be a Jewess! But why? Why? I don't know!"

BRAVE SEVENTEE BAI

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Old Deccan Days*, by M. Frere

Siu Rajah,[37] who reigned long years ago in the country of Agrabrum, had an only son, to whom he was passionately attached. The Prince, whose name was Logedas, was young and handsome, and had married the beautiful Princess, Parbuttee Bai.

[37] Or Singh Rajah, the Lion King.

Now it came to pass that Siu Rajah's Wuzeer[38] had a daughter called Seventee Bai (the Daisy Lady), who was as fair as the morning, and beloved by all for her gentleness and goodness; and when Logedas Rajah saw her, he fell in love with her, and determined to marry her. But when Siu Rajah heard of this he was very angry, and sent for his son, and said: "Of all that is rich and costly in my kingdom I have withheld nothing from you, and in Parbuttee Bai you have a wife as fair as heart could wish; nevertheless, if you are desirous of having a second wife, I freely give you leave to do so; there are daughters of many neighboring kings who would be proud to become your Queen, but it is beneath your dignity to marry a Wuzeer's daughter; and, if you do, my love for you shall not prevent my expelling you from the kingdom." Logedas did not heed his father's threat, and he married Seventee Bai; which the Rajah learning, ordered him immediately to quit the country; but yet, because he loved him much, he gave Logedas many elephants, camels, horses, palanquins and attendants, that he might not need help on the journey, and that his rank might be apparent to all.

[38] Or Vizier.

So Logedas Rajah and his two young wives set forth on their travels. Before, however, they had gone very far, the Prince dismissed the whole of his retinue, except the elephant on which he himself rode, and the palanquin, carried by two men, in which his wives traveled. Thus, almost alone, he started through the jungle in search of a new home; but, being wholly ignorant of that part of the country, before they had gone very far they lost their way. The poor Princesses were reduced to a state of great misery; day after day they wandered on, living on roots or wild berries and the leaves of trees pounded down; and by night they were terrified by the cries of wild beasts in search of prey. Logedas Rajah became more melancholy and desponding every day; until, one night, maddened by the thought of his wives' sad condition, and unable longer to bear the sight of their distress, he got up, and casting aside his royal robes, twisted a coarse

handkerchief about his head, after the manner of a fakeer's (holy beggar's) turban, and throwing a woolen cloak around him, ran away in disguise into the jungle.

A little while after he had gone, the Wuzeer's daughter awoke and found Parbuttee Bai crying bitterly. "Sister dear," said she, "what is the matter?" "Ah, sister," answered Parbuttee Bai, "I am crying because in my dreams I thought our husband had dressed himself like a fakeer and run away into the jungle; and I awoke, and found it was all true: he has gone, and left us here alone. It would have been better we had died than that such a misfortune should have befallen us." "Do not cry," said Seventee Bai: "if we cry we are lost, for the palkee-bearers[39] will think we are only two weak women, and will run away, and leave us in the jungle, out of which we can never get by ourselves. Keep a cheerful mind, and all will be well; who knows but we may yet find our husband? Meanwhile, I will dress myself in his clothes, and take the name of Seventee Rajah, and you shall be my wife; and the palkee-bearers will think it is only I that have been lost; and it will not seem very wonderful to them that in such a place as this a wild beast should have devoured me."

[39] _I.e._, palanquin-bearers.

Then Parbuttee Bai smiled and said, "Sister, you speak well; you have a brave heart. I will be your little wife."

So Seventee Bai dressed herself in her husband's clothes, and next day she mounted the elephant as he had done, and ordered the bearers to take up the palkee in which Parbuttee Bai was, and again attempt to find their way out of the jungle. The palkee-bearers wondered much to themselves what had become of Seventee Bai, and they said to one another, "How selfish and how fickle are the rich! See now our young Rajah, who married the Wuzeer's daughter and brought all this trouble on himself thereby (and in truth 'tis said she was a beautiful lady), he seemed to love her as his own soul; but now that she has been devoured by some cruel animal in this wild jungle, he appears scarcely to mourn her death."

After journeying for some days under the wise direction of the Wuzeer's daughter, the party found themselves getting out of the jungle, and at last they came to an open plain, in the middle of which was a large city. When the citizens saw the elephant coming they ran out to see who was on it, and returning, told their Rajah that a very handsome Rajah, richly dressed, was riding toward the city, and that he brought with him his wife--a most lovely Princess. Whereupon the Rajah of that country sent to Seventee Bai, and asked her who she was, and why she had come? Seventee Bai replied, "My name is Seventee Rajah. My father was angry with me, and drove me from his kingdom; and I and my wife have been wandering for many days in the jungle, where

we lost our way."

The Rajah and all his court thought they had never seen so brave and royal-looking a Prince; and the Rajah said that if Seventee Rajah would take service under him, he would give him as much money as he liked. To whom the Wuzeer's daughter replied: "I am not accustomed to take service under anybody; but you are good to us in receiving us courteously and offering us your protection; therefore, give me whatever post you please, and I will be your faithful servant." So the Rajah gave Seventee Bai a salary of £24,000 a-year and a beautiful house, and treated her with the greatest confidence, consulting her in all matters of importance, and entrusting her with many state affairs; and from her gentleness and kindness, none felt envious at her good fortune, but she was beloved and honored by all; and thus these two Princesses lived for twelve years in that city. No one suspected that Seventee Bai was not the Rajah she pretended to be, and she most strictly forbade Parbuttee Bai's making a great friend of anybody, or admitting any one to her confidence; for, she said, "Who knows, then, but some day you may, unawares, reveal that I am only Seventee Bai; and, though I love you as my very sister, if that were told by you, I would kill you with my own hands."

Now the King's palace was on the side of the city nearest to the jungle, and one night the Ranee was awakened by loud and piercing shrieks coming from that direction; so she woke her husband, and said, "I am so frightened by that terrible noise that I cannot sleep. Send some one to see what is the matter." And the Rajah called all his attendants, and said, "Go down toward the jungle and see what that noise is about." But they were all afraid, for the night was very dark, and the noise very dreadful, and they said to him: "We are afraid to go. We dare not do so by ourselves. Send for this young Rajah who is such a favorite of yours, and tell him to go. He is brave. You pay him more than you do us all. What is the good of your paying him so much, unless he can be of use when he is wanted?" So they all went to Seventee Bai's house, and when she heard what was the matter, she jumped up, and said she would go down to the jungle and see what the noise was.

This noise had been made by a Rakshas,[40] who was standing under a gallows on which a thief had been hanged the day before. He had been trying to reach the corpse with his cruel claws; but it was just too high for him, and he was howling with rage and disappointment. When, however, the Wuzeer's daughter reached the place, no Rakshas was to be seen; but in his stead a very old woman, in a wonderful glittering saree, sitting wringing her withered hands under the gallows tree, and above, the corpse, swaying about in the night wind. "Old woman," said Seventee Bai, "what is the matter?" "Alas!" said the Rakshas (for it was he), "my son hangs above on that gallows. He is dead, he is dead! and I am too bent with age to be able to reach the rope and cut his

body down." "Poor old woman!" said Seventee Bai; "get upon my shoulders, and you will then be tall enough to reach your son." So the Rakshas mounted on Seventee Bai's shoulders, who held him steady by his glittering saree. Now, as she stood there, Seventee Bai began to think the old woman was a very long time cutting the rope round the dead man's neck; and just at that moment the moon shone out from behind a cloud, and Seventee Bai, looking up, saw that instead of a feeble old woman, she was supporting on her shoulders a Rakshas, who was tearing down portions of the flesh and devouring it. Horror-stricken, she sprang back, and with a shrill scream the Rakshas fled away, leaving in her hands the shining saree.

[40] Gigantic demoniacal ogres, who can at will assume any shape. Their chief terrestrial delight is said to be digging dead bodies out of their graves and devouring them.

Seventee Bai did not choose to say anything about this adventure to the Ranee, not wishing to alarm her; so she merely returned to the palace, and said that the noise was made by an old woman whom she had found crying under the gallows. She then returned home, and gave the bright saree to Parbuttee Bai.

One fine day, some time after this, two of the Rajah's little daughters thought they would go and see Parbuttee Bai; and as it happened, Parbuttee Bai had on the Rakshas' saree, and was standing by the half-closed window shutters looking out, when the Princesses arrived at her house. The little Princesses were quite dazzled by the golden saree, and running home said to their mother, "That young Rajah's wife has the most beautiful saree we ever saw. It shines like the sun, and dazzles one's eyes. We have no sarees half so beautiful, and although you are Ranee, you have none so rich as that. Why do you not get one too?"

When the Ranee heard about Parbuttee Bai's saree she was very eager to have one like it; and she said to the Rajah, "Your servant's wife is dressed more richly than your Ranee. I hear Parbuttee Bai has a saree more costly than any of mine. Now, therefore, I beg you to get me one like hers; for I cannot rest until I have one equally costly."

Then the Rajah sent for Seventee Bai, and said, "Tell me where your wife got her beautiful golden saree; for the Ranee desires to have one like it." Seventee Bai answered, "Noble master, that saree came from a very far country--even the country of the Rakshas. It is impossible to get one like it here; but if you give me leave I will go and search for their country, and, if I succeed in finding it, bring you home sarees of the same kind." And the Rajah was very much pleased, and ordered Seventee Bai to go. So she returned to her house and bade good-bye to Parbuttee Bai, and warned her to be discreet and cautious; and then, mounting her horse, rode away in search of the Rakshas'

country.

Seventee Bai traveled for many days through the jungle, going one hundred miles every day, and staying to rest every now and then at little villages on her road. At last one day, after having gone several hundred miles, she came to a fine city situated on the banks of a beautiful river, and on the city walls a proclamation was painted in large letters. Seventee Bai inquired of the people what it meant, who told her that it was to say the Rajah's daughter would marry any man who could tame a certain pony belonging to her father, which was very vicious.

"Has no one been able to manage it?" asked Seventee Bai. "No one," they said. "Many have tried, but failed miserably. The pony was born on the same day as the Princess. It is so fierce that no one can approach it; but when the Princess heard how wild it was, she vowed she would marry no one who could not tame it. Every one who likes is free to try." Then Seventee Bai said, "Show me the pony to-morrow. I think I shall be able to tame it." They answered, "You can try if you like, but it is very dangerous, and you are but a youth." She replied, "God gives his strength to the weak. I do not fear." So she went to sleep, and early next morning they beat a drum all round the town to let every one know that another man was going to try and tame the Rajah's pony, and all the people flocked out of their houses to see the sight. The pony was in a field near the river, and Seventee Bai ran up to it, as it came running toward her intending to trample her to death, and seized it firmly by the mane, so that it could neither strike her with its fore legs nor kick her. The pony tried to shake her off, but Seventee Bai clung firmly on, and finally jumped on its back; and when the pony found that it was mastered, it became quite gentle and tame. Then Seventee Bai, to show how completely she had conquered, put spurs to the pony to make it jump the river, and the pony immediately sprang up in the air and right across the river (which was a jump of three miles), and this it did three times (for it was strong and agile, and had never been ridden before); and when all the people saw this they shouted for joy, and ran down to the river bank and brought Seventee Bai, riding in triumph on the pony, to see the Rajah. And the Rajah said, "Oh, best of men, and worthy of all honor, you have won my daughter." So he took Seventee Bai to the palace and paid her great honor, and gave her jewels and rich clothes, and horses and camels innumerable. The Princess also came to greet the winner of her hand. Then they said, "To-morrow shall be the wedding day." But Seventee Bai replied, "Great Rajah and beautiful Princess, I am going on an important errand of my own Rajah's; let me, I pray you, first accomplish the duty on which I am bound, and on my way home I will come through this city and claim my bride." At this they were both pleased, and the Rajah said, "It is well spoken. Do not let us hinder your keeping faith with your own Rajah. Go your way. We shall eagerly await your return, when you shall claim the Princess and all

your possessions, and we will have such a gay wedding as was not since the world began." And they went out with her to the borders of their land, and showed her on her way.

So the Wuzeer's daughter traveled on in search of the Rakshas' country, until at last one day she came in sight of another fine large town. Here she rested in the house for travelers for some days. Now the Rajah of this country had a very beautiful daughter, who was his only child, and for her he had built a splendid bath. It was like a little sea, and had high marble walls all around, with a hedge of spikes at the top of the walls, so high that at a distance it looked like a great castle. The young Princess was very fond of it, and she vowed she would only marry a man who could jump across her bath on horseback. This had happened some years before, but no one had been able to do it, which grieved the Rajah and Ranee very much; for they wished to see their daughter happily married. And they said to her, "We shall both be dead before you get a husband. What folly is this, to expect that any one should be able to jump over those high marble walls, with the spikes at the top!" The Princess only answered, "Then I will never marry. It matters not; I will never have a husband who has not jumped those walls."

So the Rajah caused it to be proclaimed throughout the land that he would give his daughter in marriage, and great riches, to whoever could jump, on horseback, over the Princess' bath.

All this Seventee Bai learnt as soon as she arrived in the town, and she said, "To-morrow I will try and jump over the Princess' bath." The country people said to her, "You speak foolishly: it is quite impossible." She replied, "Heaven, in which I trust, will help me." So next day she rose up, and saddled her horse, and led him in front of the palace, and there she sprang on his back, and going at full gallop, leapt over the marble walls, over the spikes high up in the air, and down on to the ground on the other side of the bath; and this she did three times, which, when the the Rajah saw, he was filled with joy, and sent for Seventee Bai, and said, "Tell me your name, brave Prince; for you are the only man in the world--you have won my daughter." Then the Wuzeer's daughter replied, "My name is Seventee Rajah. I come from a far country on a mission from my Rajah to the country of the Rakshas; let me therefore, I pray you, first do my appointed work, and if I live to return, I will come through this country and claim my bride." To which the Rajah consented, for he did not wish the Princess, his daughter, to undertake so long and tiresome a journey. It was therefore agreed that the Princess should await Seventee Bai's return at her father's court, and that Seventee Bai herself should immediately proceed on her journey.

From this place she went on for many, many days without adventure, and traversed a dense jungle, for her brave heart carried her through all

difficulties. At last she arrived at another large city, beautifully situated by a lake, with blue hills rising behind it, and sheltering it from the cutting winds; little gardens filled with pomegranates, jasmine and other fragrant and lovely flowers reached down from the city to the water's edge.

Seventee Bai, tired with her long journey, rode up to one of the Malees' houses, where the hospitable inmates, seeing she was a stranger and weary, offered her food and shelter for the night, which she thankfully accepted.

As they all sat round the fire cooking their evening meal, Seventee Bai asked the Malee's wife about the place and the people, and what was going on in the town. "Much excitement," she replied, "has of late been caused by our Rajah's dream, which no one can interpret." "What did he dream?" asked Seventee Bai. "Ever since he was ten years old," she replied, "he has dreamed of a fair tree growing in a large garden. The stem of the tree is made of silver, the leaves are pure gold, and the fruit is bunches of pearls. The Rajah has inquired of all his wise men and seers where such a tree is to be found; but they all replied, 'There is no such tree in the world;' wherefore he is dissatisfied and melancholy. Moreover, the Princess, his daughter, hearing of her father's dream, has determined to marry no man save the finder of this marvelous tree." "It is very odd," said Seventee Bai; and, their supper being over, she dragged her mattress outside the little house (as a man would have done), and, placing it in a sheltered nook near the lake, knelt down, as her custom was, to say her prayers before going to sleep.

As she knelt there, with her eyes fixed on the dark water, she saw, on a sudden, a glorious shining light coming slowly toward her, and discovered, in a minute or two more, that a very large cobra was crawling up the steps from the water's edge, having in his mouth an enormous diamond, the size and shape of an egg, that sparkled and shone like a little sun, or as if one of the stars had suddenly dropped out of heaven. The cobra laid the diamond down at the top of the steps, and crawled away in search of food. Presently returning when the night was far spent, he picked up the diamond again, and slid down the steps with it into the lake. Seventee Bai knew not what to make of this, but she resolved to return to the same place next night and watch for the cobra.

Again she saw him bring the diamond in his mouth, and take it away with him after his evening meal; and again, a third night, the same thing. Then Seventee Bai determined to kill the cobra, and if possible secure the diamond. So early next morning she went into the bazaar, and ordered a blacksmith to make her a very strong iron trap, which should catch hold of anything it was let down upon so firmly as to require the strength of twelve men to get out of it. The blacksmith

did as he was ordered, and made a very strong trap; the lower part of it was like knives, and when it caught hold of anything it required the strength of twelve men to break through it and escape.

Seventee Bai had this trap hung up by a rope to a tree close to the lake, and all around she scattered flowers and sweet scents, such as cobras love; and at nightfall she herself got into the tree just above the trap, and waited for the cobra to come as he was wont.

About twelve o'clock the cobra came up the steps from the lake in search of food. He had the diamond in his mouth, and, attracted by the sweet scents and flowers, instead of going into the jungle, he proceeded toward the tree in which Seventee Bai was.

When Seventee Bai saw him, she untied the rope and let down the trap upon him; but for fear he might not be quite dead, she waited till morning before going to get the diamond.

As soon as the sun was up, she went to look at her prey. There he lay cold and dead, with the diamond, which shone like a mountain of light, in his mouth. Seventee Bai took it, and, tired by her night of watching, thought she would bathe in the lake before returning to the Malee's cottage. So she ran and knelt down by the brink, to dip her hands and face in the cool water; but no sooner did she touch its surface with the diamond, than it rolled back in a wall on either hand, and she saw a pathway leading down below the lake, on each side of which were beautiful houses and gardens full of flowers, red, and white, and blue. Seventee Bai resolved to see whither this might lead, so she walked down the path until she came opposite a large door. She opened it, and found herself in a more lovely garden than she had ever seen on earth; tall trees laden with rich fruit grew in it, and on the boughs were bright birds singing melodiously, while the ground was covered with flowers, among which flew many gaudy butterflies.

In the centre of the garden grew one tree more beautiful than all the rest: _the stem was of silver, the leaves were golden, and the fruit was clusters of pearls_. Swinging amid the branches sat a young girl, more fair than any earthly lady; she had a face like the angels which men only see in dreams; her eyes were like two stars, her golden hair fell in ripples to her feet; she was singing to herself. When she saw the stranger, she gave a little cry, and said, "Ah, my lord, why do you come here?" Seventee Bai answered, "May I not come to see you, beautiful lady?" Then the lady said, "Oh, sir, you are welcome; but if my father sees you here, he will kill you. I am the great Cobra's daughter, and he made this garden for me to play in, and here I have played these many, many years all alone, for he lets me see no one, not even of our own subjects. I never saw any one before you. Speak, beautiful Prince--tell me how you came here, and who you are?" Seventee Bai answered, "I am Seventee Rajah: have no fear--the stern

Cobra is no more." Then the lady was joyful, when she heard that the Cobra who had tyrannized over her was dead, and she said her name was Hera Bai (the Diamond Lady), and that she was possessor of all the treasures under the lake; and she said to Seventee Bai, "Stay with me here; you shall be king of all this country, and I will be your wife." "That cannot be," answered Seventee Bai, "for I have been sent on a mission by my Rajah, and I must continue my journey until I have accomplished it; but if you love me as I love you, come rather with me to my own land, and you shall be my wife." Hera Bai shook her head. "Not so, dearest," she said, "for if I go with you, all the people will see how fair I am, and they will kill you, and sell me for a slave; and so I shall bring evil upon you, and not good. But take this flute, dear husband (and saying this, she gave Seventee Bai a little golden flute); whenever you wish to see me, or are in need of my aid, go into the jungle and play upon it, and before the sound ceases I will be there; but do not play it in the towns, nor yet amid a crowd." Then Seventee Bai put the flute in the folds of her dress, and she bade farewell to Hera Bai and went away.

When she came back to the Malee's cottage, the Malee's wife said to her, "We became alarmed about you, sir; for two days we have seen nothing of you; and we thought you must have gone away. Where have you been so long?" Seventee Bai answered, "I had business of my own in the bazaar" (for she did not choose to tell the Malee's wife that she had been under the lake); "now go and inquire what time your Rajah's Wuzeer can give a stranger audience, for I must see him before I leave this city." So the Malee's wife went; whilst she was gone, Seventee Bai went down again to the edge of the lake, and there reverently burnt the cobra's body, both for the sake of Hera Bai, and because the cobra is a sacred animal. Next day (the Malee's wife having brought a favorable answer from the palace) Seventee Bai went to see the Wuzeer. Now the Wuzeer wondered much why she came to see him, and he said, "Who are you, and what is your errand?" Whereupon she answered, "I am Seventee Rajah. I am going a long journey on my own Rajah's account, and happening to be passing through this city, I came to pay you a friendly visit." Then the Wuzeer became quite cordial, and talked with Seventee Bai about the country and the city, and the Rajah and his wonderful dream. And Seventee Bai said, "What do you suppose your Rajah would give to any one who could show him the tree of which he has so often dreamed?" The Wuzeer replied, "He would certainly give him his daughter in marriage and the half of his kingdom." "Very well," said Seventee Bai, "tell your master that, upon these conditions, if he likes to send for me, I will show him the tree; he may look at it for one night, but he cannot have it for his own."

The Wuzeer took the message to the Rajah, and next day the Wuzeer, the Sirdars, and all the great men of the court, went in state by the Rajah's order to the Malee's hut, to say that he was willing to grant all Seventee Rajah's demands, and would like to see the tree that very

night. Seventee Bai thereupon promised the Wuzeer that if the Rajah would come with his court, he should see the reality of his dream. Then she went into the jungle and played on her little flute, and Hera Bai immediately appeared as she had seen her before, swinging in the silver tree; and when she heard what Seventee Bai wanted, she bade her bring the Rajah, who should see it without fail.

When the Rajah came, he and all his court were overcome with astonishment; for there, in the midst of the desolate jungle, was a beautiful palace; fountains played in every court, the rooms were richly decorated with thousands and thousands of shining jewels; a light as clear as day filled all the place, soft music was played around by unseen hands, sweet odors filled the air, and in the midst of the palace garden there grew _a silver tree, with golden leaves and fruit of pearls_.

The next morning all had disappeared; but the Rajah, enchanted with what he had seen, remained true to his promise, and agreed to give Seventee Bai the half of his kingdom and his daughter in marriage; for, said he to himself, "A man who can convert the jungle into a paradise in one night must surely be rich enough and clever enough to be my son-in-law." But Seventee Bai said, "I am now employed on an errand of my Rajah's; let me, I beg, first accomplish it, and on my homeward journey I will remain a while in this town, and will marry the Princess." So they gave him leave to go, and the Rajah and all the great men of his kingdom accompanied Seventee Bai to the borders of their land. Thence the Wuzeer's daughter went on journeying many days until she had left that country far behind; but as yet she had gained no clue as to the way to the Rakshas' land. In this difficulty she bethought her of Hera Bai, and played upon the little golden flute. Hera Bai immediately appeared, saying, "Husband, what can I do for you?" Seventee Bai answered, "Kind Hera, I have now been wandering in this jungle for many days, endeavoring in vain to discover the Rakshas' country, whither my Rajah has ordered me to go. Can you help me to get there?" She answered, "You cannot go there by yourself. For a six months' journey round their land there is placed a Rakshas' guard, and not a sparrow could find his way into the country without their knowledge and permission. No men are admitted there, and there are more Rakshas employed in keeping guard than there are trees on the face of the earth. They are invisible, but they would see you, and instantly tear you to pieces. Be, however, guided by me, and I will contrive a way by which you may gain what you seek. Take this ring (and so saying, she placed a glorious ring on Seventee Bai's finger); it was given me by my dearest friend, the Rajah of the Rakshas' daughter, and will render you invisible. Look at that mountain, whose blue head you can just see against the sky; you must climb to the top of that, for it stands on the borders of the Rakshas' territory. When there, turn the stone on the ring I have given you toward the palm of your hand, and you will instantly fall through the earth into the

space below the mountain where the Rakshas' Rajah holds his court, and find yourself in his daughter's presence. Tell her you are my husband; she will love and help you for my sake." Hera Bai so saying disappeared, and Seventee Bai continued her journey until she reached the mountain top, where she turned the ring round as she had been bidden, and immediately found herself falling through the earth, down, down, down, deeper and deeper, until at last she arrived in a beautiful room, richly furnished, and hung round with cloth of gold. In every direction, as far as the eye could reach, were thousands and thousands of Rakshas, and in the centre of the room was a gold and ivory throne, on which sat the most beautiful Princess that it is possible to imagine. She was tall and of a commanding aspect; her black hair was bound by long strings of pearl; her dress was of fine spun gold, and round her waist was clasped a zone of restless, throbbing, light-giving diamonds; her neck and her arms were covered with a profusion of costly jewels; but brighter than all shone her bright eyes, which looked full of gentle majesty. She could see Seventee Bai, although her attendants could not, because of the magic ring; and as soon as she saw her she started and cried, "Who are you? How came you here?" Seventee Bai answered, "I am Seventee Rajah, the husband of the Lady Hera, and I have come here by the power of the magic ring you gave her." The Rakshas' Princess then said, "You are welcome: but you must know that your coming is attended with much danger; for, did the guard placed around me by my father know of your presence, they would instantly put you to death, and I should be powerless to save you. Tell me why did you come?" Seventee Bai answered, "I came to see you, beautiful lady; tell me your name, and how it is you are here all alone." She replied, "I am the Rakshas' Rajah's only daughter, and my name is Tara Bai (the Star Lady), and because my father loves me very much he has built this palace for me, and placed this great guard of Rakshas all round for many thousand miles, to prevent any one coming in or out without his permission.

"So great is the state they keep that I seldom see my father and mother; indeed, I have not seen them for several years. Nevertheless, I will go now in person to implore their protection for you; for though I never saw king nor prince before, I love you very much."

So saying, she arose to go to her father's court, bidding Seventee Bai await her return.

When the Rajah and Ranee of the Rakshas heard that their daughter was coming to see them, they were very much surprised, and said, "What can be the matter with our daughter? Can she be ill? or can our Tara Bai be unhappy in the beautiful house we have given her?" And they said to her, "Daughter, why do you come? what is the matter?" She answered, "Oh, my father! I come to tell you I should like to be married. Cannot you find some beautiful Prince to be my husband?" Then the Rajah laughed, and said, "You are but a child still, my daughter;

nevertheless, if you wish for a husband, certainly, if any Prince comes here, and asks you in marriage, we will let you wed him." She said, "If some brave and beautiful Prince were to come here, and get through the great guard you have placed around the palace, would you indeed protect him for my sake, and not allow them to tear him in pieces?" The Rajah answered, "If such a one come, he shall be safe." Then Tara Bai was very joyful, and ran and fetched Seventee Bai, and said to her father and mother, "See here is Seventee Rajah, the young Prince of whom I spoke." And when the Rajah and Ranee saw Seventee Bai they were greatly astonished, and could not think how she had managed to reach their land, and they thought she must be very brave and wise to have done so. And because also Seventee Bai looked a very noble Prince, they were the more willing that she should marry Tara Bai, and said, "Seventee Rajah, we are willing you should be our son-in-law, for you look good and true, and you must be brave, to have come so long and dangerous a journey for your wife; now, therefore, you shall be married; the whole land is open to you, and all that we have is yours; only take good care of our dear daughter, and if ever she or you are unhappy, return here and you shall find a home with us." So the wedding took place amidst great rejoicings. The wedding festivities lasted twelve days, and to it came hundreds and hundreds of thousands of Rakshas from every country under heaven; from the north and the south and the east and the west, from the depths of the earth and the uttermost parts of the sea. Troop after troop they came flocking in, an ever-increasing crowd, from all parts of this wide world, to be present at the marriage of their master's daughter.

It would be impossible to count all the rich and costly presents that the Rakshas' Rajah and Ranee gave Tara Bai. There were jewels enough to fill the seas; diamonds and emeralds, rubies, sapphires and pearls; gold and silver, costly hangings, carved ebony and ivory, more than a man could count in a hundred years; for the Rajah gave his daughter a guard of 100,000,000,000,000 Rakshas, and each Rakshas carried a bundle of riches, and each bundle was as big as a house! and so they took leave of the Rakshas' Rajah and Ranee, and left the Rakshas' country.

When they got to the country of the Rajah who had dreamed about the silver tree, with leaves of gold and fruit of pearl (because the number of their retinue was so great that if they had come into a country they would have devoured all that was in it like a swarm of locusts), Seventee Bai and Tara Bai determined that Tara Bai should stay with the guard of Rakshas in the jungle, on the borders of the Rajah's dominions, and that Seventee Bai should go to the city, as she had promised, to marry the Rajah's daughter. And there they stayed a week, and the Rajah's daughter was married with great pomp and ceremony to Seventee Bai; and when they left the city the Rajah gave Seventee Bai and the bride, his daughter, horses and camels and elephants, and rich robes and jewels innumerable; and he and all his

court accompanied them to the borders of the land.

Thence they went to the country where lived the Princess whose great marble bath Seventee Bai had jumped over; and there Seventee Bai was married to her, amid great rejoicings, and the wedding was one of surpassing splendor, and the wedding festivities lasted for three whole days.

And leaving that city, they traveled on until they reached the city where Seventee Bai had tamed the Rajah's wild pony, and there they spent two days in great honor and splendor, and Seventee Bai married that Princess also; so with her five wives--that is to say, Hera Bai the Rajah of the Cobras' daughter, Tara Bai the Rajah of the Rakshas' daughter, and the three other Princesses--and a great tribe of attendants and elephants and camels and horses, she returned to the city where she had left Parbuttee Bai.

Now when news was brought to Seventee Bai's master (the friendly Rajah), of the great cavalcade that was approaching his city, he became very much alarmed, taking Seventee Bai for some strange Rajah who had come to make war upon him. When Seventee Bai heard how alarmed he was, she sent a messenger to him, on a swift horse, to say, "Be not alarmed; it is only thy servant, Seventee Rajah, returning from the errand on which thou didst send him." Then the Rajah's heart was light, and he ordered a royal salute to be fired, and went out with all his court to meet Seventee Bai, and they all went together in a state procession into the city. And Seventee Bai said to the Rajah, "You sent your servant to the Rakshas' country to fetch a golden saree for the Ranee. Behold, I have done as you wish." And so saying, she gave to the Rajah five Rakshas' bundles of rich hangings and garments covered with jewels (that is to say, five housefuls of costly things; for each Rakshas carried as much in the bundle on his shoulders as a house would hold); and to the Wuzeer she gave two bundles.

After this, Seventee Bai discharged almost all her immense train of attendants (for fear they should create a famine in the land), sending them to their own houses with many valuable presents; and she took the three Princesses, her wives, to live with her and Parbuttee Bai; but Hera Bai and Tara Bai, on account of their high rank and their surpassing beauty, had a splendid palace of their own in the jungle, of which no one knew but Seventee Bai.

Now when she again saw Seventee Bai, the Rajah's little daughter said to her father, "Father, I do not think there is such a brave and beautiful Prince in all the world as this Seventee Rajah. I would rather have him for my husband than any one else." And the Rajah said, "Daughter, I am very willing you should marry him." So it was settled Seventee Bai should marry the little Princess; but she said to the Rajah, "I am willing to marry your daughter, but we must have a very

grand wedding; give me time, therefore, to send into all the countries round, and invite all their Rajahs to be present at the ceremony." And to this the Rajah agreed.

Now, about this time, Seventee Bai one day found Parbuttee Bai crying, and said to her, "Little sister, why are you unhappy?" And Parbuttee Bai answered, "Oh sister, you have brought us out of all our difficulties, and won us honor and great riches, but yet I do not feel merry; for I cannot help thinking of our poor husband, who is now, maybe, wandering about a wretched beggar, and I long with my whole heart to see him again." Then Seventee Bai said, "Well, cheer up, do not cry; mind those women do not find out I am not Seventee Rajah. Keep a good heart, and I will try and find your husband for you." So Seventee Bai went into the jungle palace to see Hera Bai, and said to her, "I have a friend whom I have not seen since he became mad twelve years ago, and ran away into the jungle disguised as a Fakeer. I should like very much to find out if he is still alive. How can I learn?" Now Hera Bai was a very wise Princess, and she answered, "Your best plan will be to provide a great feast for the poor, and cause it to be proclaimed in all lands, far and near, that you are about to give it as a thank-offering for all the blessings God has bestowed on you. The poor will flock from all countries to come to it, and perhaps among the rest you may find your friend."

Seventee Bai did as Hera Bai had advised, causing two long tables to be spread in the jungle, whereat hundreds of poor from all parts of the world were daily entertained; and every day, for six months, Seventee Bai and Parbuttee Bai walked down the long rows of people, apparently to see how they were all getting on, but in reality to look for Logedas Rajah; but they found him not.

At last one day, as Seventee Bai was going her accustomed round, she saw a wretched wild-looking man, black as pitch, with tangled hair, a thin wrinkled face, and in his hand a wooden bowl, such as Fakeers carry about to collect broken meat and scraps of bread in, and touching Parbuttee Bai, she said to her, "See, Parbuttee, there is your husband." When Parbuttee Bai saw this pitiful sight (for it was, indeed, Logedas, but so changed and altered that even his wives hardly recognized him), she began to cry. Then Seventee Bai said, "Do not cry; go home quickly. I will take care of him." And when Parbuttee Bai was gone, she called one of the guard and said to him, "Catch hold of that man and put him in prison." Then Logedas Rajah said, "Why do you seize me? I have done no harm to any one." But Seventee Bai ordered the guard not to heed his remonstrances, but to take him to prison instantly, for she did not wish the people around to discover how interested she was in him. So the guard took Logedas Rajah away to lock him up. Poor Logedas Rajah said to them, "Why has this wicked Rajah had me taken prisoner? I have harmed no one. I have not fought, nor robbed; but for twelve years I have been a wretched beggar, living

on the bread of charity." For he did not tell them he was a Rajah's son, for he knew they would only laugh at him. They replied. "You must not call our Rajah wicked; it is you that are wicked, and not he, and doubtless he will have your head cut off."

When they put him in prison he begged them again to say what was to be done to him. "Oh!" said they, "you will certainly be hanged to-morrow morning, or perhaps, if you like it better, beheaded, in front of the palace."

Now as soon as Seventee Bai got home, she sent for her head servants, and said to them, "Go at once to the prison, and order the guard to give you up the Fakeer I gave into their charge, and bring him here in a palanquin, but see that he does not escape." Then Seventee Bai ordered them to lock up Logedas in a distant part of the palace, and commanded that he should be washed, and dressed in new clothes, and given food, and that a barber should be sent for, to cut his hair and trim his beard. Then Logedas said to his keepers, "See how good the Rajah is to me! He will not surely hang me after this." "Oh, never fear," they answered; "when you are dressed up and made very smart, it will be a much finer sight to see you hanged than before." Thus they tried to frighten the poor man. After this Seventee Bai sent for all the greatest doctors in the kingdom, and said to them, "If a Rajah wanders about for twelve years in the jungle, until all trace of his princely beauty is lost, how long will it take you to restore him to his original likeness?" They answered, "With care and attention it may be done in six months." "Very well," said Seventee Bai, "there is a friend of mine now in my palace of whom this is the case. Take him and treat him well, and at the end of six months I shall expect to see him restored to his original health and strength."

So Logedas was placed under the doctors' care; but all this time he had no idea who Seventee Bai was, nor why he was thus treated. Every day Seventee Bai came to see him and talk to him. Then he said to his keepers, "See, good people, how kind this great Rajah is, coming to see me every day; he can intend for me nothing but good." To which they would answer, "Don't you be in a hurry; none can fathom the hearts of kings. Most probably, for all this delay, he will in the end have you taken and hanged." Thus they amused themselves by alarming him.

Then, some day, when Seventee Bai had been more than usually kind, Logedas Rajah would say again, "I do not fear the Rajah's intentions toward me. Did you not notice how very kind he was to-day!" And to this his keepers would reply--

"Doubtless it is amusing for him, but hardly, we should think, for you. He will play with you probably for some time (as a cat does with a mouse); but in three months is the Rajah's birthday; most likely he

is keeping you to kill you then." And so the time wore on.

Seventee Bai's birthday was fixed for the day also of her wedding with the Rajah's daughter. For this great event immense preparations were made all over the plain outside the city walls. Tents made of cloth of gold were pitched in a great square, twelve miles long and twelve miles broad, for the accommodation of the neighboring Rajahs, and in the centre was a larger tent than all the rest, covered with jewels and shining like a great golden temple, in which they were to assemble.

Then Seventee Bai said to Parbuttee Bai, "On my birthday I will restore you to your husband." But Parbuttee Bai was vexed and said, "I cannot bear the thought of him; it is such a terrible thing to think of our once handsome husband as none other than that miserable Fakeer."

Seventee Bai smiled. "In truth," she said, "I think you will find him again altered, and for the better. You cannot think what a change rest and care have made in him; but he does not know who we are, and as you value my happiness, tell no one now that I am not the Rajah." "Indeed I will not, dearest sister," answered Parbuttee Bai. "I should in truth be loath to vex you, after all you have done for me; for owing to you here have we lived happily for twelve years like sisters, and I do not think as clever a woman as you was ever before born in this world."

Among other guests invited to the wedding were Siu Rajah and his wife, and the Wuzeer, Seventee Bai's father, and her mother. Seventee Bai arranged thrones for them all, made of gold and emeralds, and diamonds, and rubies, and ivory. And she ordered that in the seat of honor on her left-hand side should be placed the Wuzeer, her father, and next to him her mother, and next to them Siu Rajah and his wife, and after them all the other Rajahs and Ranees, according to their rank; and all the Rajahs and Ranees wondered much that the place of honor should have been given to the stranger Wuzeer. Then Seventee Bai took her most costly Rajah dress, and ordered that Logedas Rajah should be clothed in it, and escorted to the tent; and she took off the man's clothes which she had worn, and dressed herself in a saree. When she was dressed in it she looked a more lovely woman than she had before looked a handsome man. And she went to the tent leading Parbuttee Bai, while with her came Hera Bai and Tara Bai of more than mortal beauty, and the three other Princesses clothed in the most costly robes. Then before all the Rajahs and Ranees, Seventee Bai knelt down at Logedas Rajah's feet, and said to him, "I am your true wife. O husband, have you forgotten her whom you left in the jungle with Parbuttee Bai twelve years ago? See here she also is; and behold these rich jewels, these tents of gold, these hangings of priceless worth, these elephants, camels, horses, attendants and all this

wealth. It is all yours, as I am yours; for I have collected all for you."

Then Logedas Rajah wept for joy, and Siu Rajah arose and kissed Seventee Bai, and said to her, "My noble daughter, you have rescued my son from misery, and done more wisely and well than woman ever did before. May all honor and blessing attend you henceforth and for ever."

And the assembled Rajahs and Ranees were surprised beyond measure, saying, "Did any one ever hear of a woman doing so much?" But more than any was the good Rajah astonished, whom Seventee Bai had served so well for twelve years, and whose daughter she was to have married that day, when he learnt that she was a woman! It was then agreed by all that Logedas Rajah should on that day be newly married to his two wives, Parbuttee Bai and Seventee Bai; and should also marry the six other beautiful Princesses--the Princess Hera Bai, the Princess Tara Bai, the Rajah's little daughter, and the three other Princesses; and that he should return with his father to his own kingdom. And the weddings took place amid great splendor and rejoicings unheard of; and of all the fine things that were seen and done on that day it is impossible to tell. And afterward Logedas Rajah and his eight wives, and his father and mother, and the Wuzeer and his wife, and all their attendants, returned to their own land, where they all lived very happily ever after. And so may all who read this story live happily too.

The "Gloria Scott"

from: Project Gutenberg's *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

"I have some papers here," said my friend Sherlock Holmes, as we sat one winter's night on either side of the fire, "which I really think, Watson, that it would be worth your while to glance over. These are the documents in the extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with horror when he read it."

He had picked from a drawer a little tarnished cylinder, and, undoing the tape, he handed me a short note scrawled upon a half-sheet of slate-gray paper.

"The supply of game for London is going steadily up," it ran.
"Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant's life."

As I glanced up from reading this enigmatical message, I saw Holmes chuckling at the expression upon my face.

"You look a little bewildered," said he.

"I cannot see how such a message as this could inspire horror. It seems to me to be rather grotesque than otherwise."

"Very likely. Yet the fact remains that the reader, who was a fine, robust old man, was knocked clean down by it as if it had been the butt end of a pistol."

"You arouse my curiosity," said I. "But why did you say just now that there were very particular reasons why I should study this case?"

"Because it was the first in which I was ever engaged."

I had often endeavored to elicit from my companion what had first turned his mind in the direction of criminal research, but had never caught him before in a communicative humor. Now he sat forward in this arm-chair and spread out the documents upon his knees. Then he lit his pipe and sat for some time smoking and turning them over.

"You never heard me talk of Victor Trevor?" he asked. "He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college. I was never a very sociable fellow, Watson, always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought, so that I never mixed much with the men of my year. Bar fencing and boxing I had few athletic

tastes, and then my line of study was quite distinct from that of the other fellows, so that we had no points of contact at all. Trevor was the only man I knew, and that only through the accident of his bull terrier freezing on to my ankle one morning as I went down to chapel.

"It was a prosaic way of forming a friendship, but it was effective. I was laid by the heels for ten days, but Trevor used to come in to inquire after me. At first it was only a minute's chat, but soon his visits lengthened, and before the end of the term we were close friends. He was a hearty, full-blooded fellow, full of spirits and energy, the very opposite to me in most respects, but we had some subjects in common, and it was a bond of union when I found that he was as friendless as I. Finally, he invited me down to his father's place at Donnithorpe, in Norfolk, and I accepted his hospitality for a month of the long vacation.

"Old Trevor was evidently a man of some wealth and consideration, a J.P., and a landed proprietor. Donnithorpe is a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere, in the country of the Broads. The house was an old-fashioned, wide-spread, oak-beamed brick building, with a fine lime-lined avenue leading up to it. There was excellent wild-duck shooting in the fens, remarkably good fishing, a small but select library, taken over, as I understood, from a former occupant, and a tolerable cook, so that he would be a fastidious man who could not put in a pleasant month there.

"Trevor senior was a widower, and my friend his only son.

"There had been a daughter, I heard, but she had died of diphtheria while on a visit to Birmingham. The father interested me extremely. He was a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of rude strength, both physically and mentally. He knew hardly any books, but he had traveled far, had seen much of the world. And had remembered all that he had learned. In person he was a thick-set, burly man with a shock of grizzled hair, a brown, weather-beaten face, and blue eyes which were keen to the verge of fierceness. Yet he had a reputation for kindness and charity on the country-side, and was noted for the leniency of his sentences from the bench.

"One evening, shortly after my arrival, we were sitting over a glass of port after dinner, when young Trevor began to talk about those habits of observation and inference which I had already formed into a system, although I had not yet appreciated the part which they were to play in my life. The old man evidently thought that his son was exaggerating in his description of one or two trivial feats which I had performed.

"'Come, now, Mr. Holmes,' said he, laughing good-humoredly. 'I'm an excellent subject, if you can deduce anything from me.'

"I fear there is not very much,' I answered; 'I might suggest that you have gone about in fear of some personal attack within the last twelvemonth.'

"The laugh faded from his lips, and he stared at me in great surprise.

"Well, that's true enough,' said he. 'You know, Victor,' turning to his son, 'when we broke up that poaching gang they swore to knife us, and Sir Edward Holly has actually been attacked. I've always been on my guard since then, though I have no idea how you know it.'

"You have a very handsome stick,' I answered. 'By the inscription I observed that you had not had it more than a year. But you have taken some pains to bore the head of it and pour melted lead into the hole so as to make it a formidable weapon. I argued that you would not take such precautions unless you had some danger to fear.'

"Anything else?' he asked, smiling.

"You have boxed a good deal in your youth.'

"Right again. How did you know it? Is my nose knocked a little out of the straight?'

"No,' said I. 'It is your ears. They have the peculiar flattening and thickening which marks the boxing man.'

"Anything else?'

"You have done a good deal of digging by your callosities.'

"Made all my money at the gold fields.'

"You have been in New Zealand.'

"Right again.'

"You have visited Japan.'

"Quite true.'

"And you have been most intimately associated with some one whose initials were J. A., and whom you afterwards were eager to entirely forget.'

"Mr. Trevor stood slowly up, fixed his large blue eyes upon me with a strange wild stare, and then pitched forward, with his face among the nutshells which strewed the cloth, in a dead faint.

"You can imagine, Watson, how shocked both his son and I were. His attack did not last long, however, for when we undid his collar, and sprinkled the water from one of the finger-glasses over his face, he gave a gasp or two and sat up.

"Ah, boys,' said he, forcing a smile, 'I hope I haven't frightened you. Strong as I look, there is a weak place in my heart, and it does not take much to knock me over. I don't know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and of fancy would be children in your hands. That's your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world.'

"And that recommendation, with the exaggerated estimate of my ability with which he prefaced it, was, if you will believe me, Watson, the very first thing which ever made me feel that a profession might be made out of what had up to that time been the merest hobby. At the moment, however, I was too much concerned at the sudden illness of my host to think of anything else.

"I hope that I have said nothing to pain you?' said I.

"Well, you certainly touched upon rather a tender point. Might I ask how you know, and how much you know?' He spoke now in a half-jesting fashion, but a look of terror still lurked at the back of his eyes.

"It is simplicity itself,' said I. 'When you bared your arm to draw that fish into the boat I saw that J. A. Had been tattooed in the bend of the elbow. The letters were still legible, but it was perfectly clear from their blurred appearance, and from the staining of the skin round them, that efforts had been made to obliterate them. It was obvious, then, that those initials had once been very familiar to you, and that you had afterwards wished to forget them.'

"What an eye you have!" he cried, with a sigh of relief. 'It is just as you say. But we won't talk of it. Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst. Come into the billiard-room and have a quiet cigar.'

"From that day, amid all his cordiality, there was always a touch of suspicion in Mr. Trevor's manner towards me. Even his son remarked it. 'You've given the governor such a turn,' said he, 'that he'll never be sure again of what you know and what you don't know.' He did not mean to show it, I am sure, but it was so strongly in his mind that it peeped out at every action. At last I became so convinced that I was causing him uneasiness that I drew my visit to a close. On the very day, however, before I left, an incident occurred which proved in the sequel to be of importance.

"We were sitting out upon the lawn on garden chairs, the three of us, basking in the sun and admiring the view across the Broads, when a maid came out to say that there was a man at the door who wanted to see Mr. Trevor.

"What is his name?" asked my host.

"He would not give any."

"What does he want, then?"

"He says that you know him, and that he only wants a moment's conversation."

"Show him round here." An instant afterwards there appeared a little wizened fellow with a cringing manner and a shambling style of walking. He wore an open jacket, with a splotch of tar on the sleeve, a red-and-black check shirt, dungaree trousers, and heavy boots badly worn. His face was thin and brown and crafty, with a perpetual smile upon it, which showed an irregular line of yellow teeth, and his crinkled hands were half closed in a way that is distinctive of sailors. As he came slouching across the lawn I heard Mr. Trevor make a sort of hiccupping noise in his throat, and jumping out of his chair, he ran into the house. He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of brandy as he passed me.

"Well, my man," said he. "What can I do for you?"

"The sailor stood looking at him with puckered eyes, and with the same loose-lipped smile upon his face.

"You don't know me?" he asked.

"Why, dear me, it is surely Hudson," said Mr. Trevor in a tone of surprise.

"Hudson it is, sir," said the seaman. "Why, it's thirty year and more since I saw you last. Here you are in your house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness cask."

"Tut, you will find that I have not forgotten old times," cried Mr. Trevor, and, walking towards the sailor, he said something in a low voice. "Go into the kitchen," he continued out loud, "and you will get food and drink. I have no doubt that I shall find you a situation."

"Thank you, sir," said the seaman, touching his fore-lock. "I'm just off a two-yearer in an eight-knot tramp, short-handed at that, and I wants a rest. I thought I'd get it either with Mr. Beddoes or with you."

"Ah!" cried Trevor. 'You know where Mr. Beddoes is?'

"Bless you, sir, I know where all my old friends are,' said the fellow with a sinister smile, and he slouched off after the maid to the kitchen. Mr. Trevor mumbled something to us about having been shipmate with the man when he was going back to the diggings, and then, leaving us on the lawn, he went indoors. An hour later, when we entered the house, we found him stretched dead drunk upon the dining-room sofa. The whole incident left a most ugly impression upon my mind, and I was not sorry next day to leave Donnithorpe behind me, for I felt that my presence must be a source of embarrassment to my friend.

"All this occurred during the first month of the long vacation. I went up to my London rooms, where I spent seven weeks working out a few experiments in organic chemistry. One day, however, when the autumn was far advanced and the vacation drawing to a close, I received a telegram from my friend imploring me to return to Donnithorpe, and saying that he was in great need of my advice and assistance. Of course I dropped everything and set out for the North once more.

"He met me with the dog-cart at the station, and I saw at a glance that the last two months had been very trying ones for him. He had grown thin and careworn, and had lost the loud, cheery manner for which he had been remarkable.

"The governor is dying,' were the first words he said.

"Impossible!" I cried. 'What is the matter?'

"Apoplexy. Nervous shock, He's been on the verge all day. I doubt if we shall find him alive.'

"I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news.

"What has caused it?' I asked.

"Ah, that is the point. Jump in and we can talk it over while we drive. You remember that fellow who came upon the evening before you left us?'

"Perfectly.'

"Do you know who it was that we let into the house that day?'

"I have no idea.'

"It was the devil, Holmes,' he cried.

"I stared at him in astonishment.

"Yes, it was the devil himself. We have not had a peaceful hour since--not one. The governor has never held up his head from that evening, and now the life has been crushed out of him and his heart broken, all through this accursed Hudson.'

"What power had he, then?'

"Ah, that is what I would give so much to know. The kindly, charitable, good old governor--how could he have fallen into the clutches of such a ruffian! But I am so glad that you have come, Holmes. I trust very much to your judgment and discretion, and I know that you will advise me for the best.'

"We were dashing along the smooth white country road, with the long stretch of the Broads in front of us glimmering in the red light of the setting sun. From a grove upon our left I could already see the high chimneys and the flag-staff which marked the squire's dwelling.

"My father made the fellow gardener,' said my companion, 'and then, as that did not satisfy him, he was promoted to be butler. The house seemed to be at his mercy, and he wandered about and did what he chose in it. The maids complained of his drunken habits and his vile language. The dad raised their wages all round to recompense them for the annoyance. The fellow would take the boat and my father's best gun and treat himself to little shooting trips. And all this with such a sneering, leering, insolent face that I would have knocked him down twenty times over if he had been a man of my own age. I tell you, Holmes, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man.

"Well, matters went from bad to worse with us, and this animal Hudson became more and more intrusive, until at last, on making some insolent reply to my father in my presence one day, I took him by the shoulders and turned him out of the room. He slunk away with a livid face and two venomous eyes which uttered more threats than his tongue could do. I don't know what passed between the poor dad and him after that, but the dad came to me next day and asked me whether I would mind apologizing to Hudson. I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household.

"Ah, my boy," said he, "it is all very well to talk, but you don't know how I am placed. But you shall know, Victor. I'll see that you shall know, come what may. You wouldn't believe harm of your poor old father, would you, lad?" He was very much moved, and shut himself up in the study all day, where I could see through the window that he was writing busily.

"That evening there came what seemed to me to be a grand release, for Hudson told us that he was going to leave us. He walked into the dining-room as we sat after dinner, and announced his intention in the thick voice of a half-drunken man.

""I've had enough of Norfolk," said he. "I'll run down to Mr. Beddoes in Hampshire. He'll be as glad to see me as you were, I dare say."

""You're not going away in an unkind spirit, Hudson, I hope," said my father, with a tameness which made my blood boil.

""I've not had my 'pology," said he sulkily, glancing in my direction.

""Victor, you will acknowledge that you have used this worthy fellow rather roughly," said the dad, turning to me.

""On the contrary, I think that we have both shown extraordinary patience towards him," I answered.

""Oh, you do, do you?" he snarls. "Very good, mate. We'll see about that!"

"He slouched out of the room, and half an hour afterwards left the house, leaving my father in a state of pitiable nervousness. Night after night I heard him pacing his room, and it was just as he was recovering his confidence that the blow did at last fall.'

"And how?' I asked eagerly.

"In a most extraordinary fashion. A letter arrived for my father yesterday evening, bearing the Fordingbridge post-mark. My father read it, clapped both his hands to his head, and began running round the room in little circles like a man who has been driven out of his senses. When I at last drew him down on to the sofa, his mouth and eyelids were all puckered on one side, and I saw that he had a stroke. Dr. Fordham came over at once. We put him to bed; but the paralysis has spread, he has shown no sign of returning consciousness, and I think that we shall hardly find him alive.'

"You horrify me, Trevor!' I cried. 'What then could have been in this letter to cause so dreadful a result?'

"Nothing. There lies the inexplicable part of it. The message was absurd and trivial. Ah, my God, it is as I feared!"

"As he spoke we came round the curve of the avenue, and saw in the fading light that every blind in the house had been drawn down. As we dashed up to the door, my friend's face convulsed with grief, a gentleman in black emerged from it.

"When did it happen, doctor?" asked Trevor.

"Almost immediately after you left."

"Did he recover consciousness?"

"For an instant before the end."

"Any message for me?"

"Only that the papers were in the back drawer of the Japanese cabinet."

"My friend ascended with the doctor to the chamber of death, while I remained in the study, turning the whole matter over and over in my head, and feeling as sombre as ever I had done in my life. What was the past of this Trevor, pugilist, traveler, and gold-digger, and how had he placed himself in the power of this acid-faced seaman? Why, too, should he faint at an allusion to the half-effaced initials upon his arm, and die of fright when he had a letter from Fordingham? Then I remembered that Fordingham was in Hampshire, and that this Mr. Beddoes, whom the seaman had gone to visit and presumably to blackmail, had also been mentioned as living in Hampshire. The letter, then, might either come from Hudson, the seaman, saying that he had betrayed the guilty secret which appeared to exist, or it might come from Beddoes, warning an old confederate that such a betrayal was imminent. So far it seemed clear enough. But then how could this letter be trivial and grotesque, as describe by the son? He must have misread it. If so, it must have been one of those ingenious secret codes which mean one thing while they seem to mean another. I must see this letter. If there were a hidden meaning in it, I was confident that I could pluck it forth. For an hour I sat pondering over it in the gloom, until at last a weeping maid brought in a lamp, and close at her heels came my friend Trevor, pale but composed, with these very papers which lie upon my knee held in his grasp. He sat down opposite to me, drew the lamp to the edge of the table, and handed me a short note scribbled, as you see, upon a single sheet of gray paper. 'The supply of game for London is going steadily up,' it ran. 'Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant's life.'"

"I dare say my face looked as bewildered as yours did just now when first I read this message. Then I reread it very carefully. It was evidently as I had thought, and some secret meaning must lie buried in this strange combination of words. Or could it be that there was a prearranged significance to such phrases as 'fly-paper' and 'hen-pheasant'? Such a meaning would be arbitrary and could not be deduced in any way. And yet I was loath to believe that this was the case, and the presence of the word Hudson seemed to show that the subject of the message was as I had guessed, and that it was from

Beddoes rather than the sailor. I tried it backwards, but the combination 'life pheasant's hen' was not encouraging. Then I tried alternate words, but neither 'the of for' nor 'supply game London' promised to throw any light upon it.

"And then in an instant the key of the riddle was in my hands, and I saw that every third word, beginning with the first, would give a message which might well drive old Trevor to despair.

"It was short and terse, the warning, as I now read it to my companion:

""The game is up. Hudson has told all. Fly for your life.'

"Victor Trevor sank his face into his shaking hands. 'It must be that, I suppose,' said he. 'This is worse than death, for it means disgrace as well. But what is the meaning of these "head-keepers" and "hen-pheasants"?'"

""It means nothing to the message, but it might mean a good deal to us if we had no other means of discovering the sender. You see that he has begun by writing "The...game...is," and so on. Afterwards he had, to fulfill the prearranged cipher, to fill in any two words in each space. He would naturally use the first words which came to his mind, and if there were so many which referred to sport among them, you may be tolerably sure that he is either an ardent shot or interested in breeding. Do you know anything of this Beddoes?'

""Why, now that you mention it,' said he, 'I remember that my poor father used to have an invitation from him to shoot over his preserves every autumn.'

""Then it is undoubtedly from him that the note comes,' said I. 'It only remains for us to find out what this secret was which the sailor Hudson seems to have held over the heads of these two wealthy and respected men.'

"Alas, Holmes, I fear that it is one of sin and shame!" cried my friend. 'But from you I shall have no secrets. Here is the statement which was drawn up by my father when he knew that the danger from Hudson had become imminent. I found it in the Japanese cabinet, as he told the doctor. Take it and read it to me, for I have neither the strength nor the courage to do it myself.'

"These are the very papers, Watson, which he handed to me, and I will read them to you, as I read them in the old study that night to him. They are endorsed outside, as you see, 'Some particulars of the voyage of the bark _Gloria Scott_, from her leaving Falmouth on the 8th October, 1855, to her destruction in N. Lat. 15 degrees 20', W. Long. 25 degrees 14' on Nov. 6th.' It is in the form of a letter, and runs in

this way:

"My dear, dear son, now that approaching disgrace begins to darken the closing years of my life, I can write with all truth and honesty that it is not the terror of the law, it is not the loss of my position in the county, nor is it my fall in the eyes of all who have known me, which cuts me to the heart; but it is the thought that you should come to blush for me--you who love me and who have seldom, I hope, had reason to do other than respect me. But if the blow falls which is forever hanging over me, then I should wish you to read this, that you may know straight from me how far I have been to blame. On the other hand, if all should go well (which may kind God Almighty grant!), then if by any chance this paper should be still undestroyed and should fall into your hands, I conjure you, by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your dear mother, and by the love which had been between us, to hurl it into the fire and to never give one thought to it again.

"If then your eye goes on to read this line, I know that I shall already have been exposed and dragged from my home, or as is more likely, for you know that my heart is weak, by lying with my tongue sealed forever in death. In either case the time for suppression is past, and every word which I tell you is the naked truth, and this I swear as I hope for mercy.

"My name, dear lad, is not Trevor. I was James Armitage in my younger days, and you can understand now the shock that it was to me a few weeks ago when your college friend addressed me in words which seemed to imply that he had surprised my secret. As Armitage it was that I entered a London banking-house, and as Armitage I was convicted of breaking my country's laws, and was sentenced to transportation. Do not think very harshly of me, laddie. It was a debt of honor, so called, which I had to pay, and I used money which was not my own to do it, in the certainty that I could replace it before there could be any possibility of its being missed. But the most dreadful ill-luck pursued me. The money which I had reckoned upon never came to hand, and a premature examination of accounts exposed my deficit. The case might have been dealt leniently with, but the laws were more harshly administered thirty years ago than now, and on my twenty-third birthday I found myself chained as a felon with thirty-seven other convicts in 'tween-decks of the bark _Gloria Scott_, bound for Australia.

"It was the year '55 when the Crimean war was at its height, and the old convict ships had been largely used as transports in the Black Sea. The government was compelled, therefore, to use smaller and less suitable vessels for sending out their prisoners. The Gloria Scott had been in the Chinese tea-trade, but she was an old-fashioned, heavy-bowed, broad-beamed craft, and the new clippers had cut her out. She was a five-hundred-ton boat; and besides her thirty-eight jail-birds, she carried twenty-six of a crew, eighteen soldiers, a

captain, three mates, a doctor, a chaplain, and four warders. Nearly a hundred souls were in her, all told, when we set sail from Falmouth.

"The partitions between the cells of the convicts, instead of being of thick oak, as is usual in convict-ships, were quite thin and frail. The man next to me, upon the aft side, was one whom I had particularly noticed when we were led down the quay. He was a young man with a clear, hairless face, a long, thin nose, and rather nut-cracker jaws. He carried his head very jauntily in the air, had a swaggering style of walking, and was, above all else, remarkable for his extraordinary height. I don't think any of our heads would have come up to his shoulder, and I am sure that he could not have measured less than six and a half feet. It was strange among so many sad and weary faces to see one which was full of energy and resolution. The sight of it was to me like a fire in a snow-storm. I was glad, then, to find that he was my neighbor, and gladder still when, in the dead of the night, I heard a whisper close to my ear, and found that he had managed to cut an opening in the board which separated us.

""Hullo, chummy!" said he, "what's your name, and what are you here for?"

"I answered him, and asked in turn who I was talking with.

""I'm Jack Prendergast," said he, "and by God! You'll learn to bless my name before you've done with me."

"I remembered hearing of his case, for it was one which had made an immense sensation throughout the country some time before my own arrest. He was a man of good family and of great ability, but of incurably vicious habits, who had by an ingenious system of fraud obtained huge sums of money from the leading London merchants.

""Ha, ha! You remember my case!" said he proudly.

""Very well, indeed."

""Then maybe you remember something queer about it?"

""What was that, then?"

""I'd had nearly a quarter of a million, hadn't I?"

""So it was said."

""But none was recovered, eh?"

""No."

""Well, where d'ye suppose the balance is?" he asked.

""I have no idea," said I.

""Right between my finger and thumb," he cried. "By God! I've got more pounds to my name than you've hairs on your head. And if you've money, my son, and know how to handle it and spread it, you can do anything. Now, you don't think it likely that a man who could do anything is going to wear his breeches out sitting in the stinking hold of a rat-gutted, beetle-ridden, mouldy old coffin of a Chin China coaster. No, sir, such a man will look after himself and will look after his chums. You may lay to that! You hold on to him, and you may kiss the book that he'll haul you through."

""That was his style of talk, and at first I thought it meant nothing; but after a while, when he had tested me and sworn me in with all possible solemnity, he let me understand that there really was a plot to gain command of the vessel. A dozen of the prisoners had hatched it before they came aboard, Prendergast was the leader, and his money was the motive power.

""I'd a partner," said he, "a rare good man, as true as a stock to a barrel. He's got the dibbs, he has, and where do you think he is at this moment? Why, he's the chaplain of this ship--the chaplain, no less! He came aboard with a black coat, and his papers right, and money enough in his box to buy the thing right up from keel to main-truck. The crew are his, body and soul. He could buy 'em at so much a gross with a cash discount, and he did it before ever they signed on. He's got two of the warders and Mereer, the second mate, and he'd get the captain himself, if he thought him worth it."

""What are we to do, then?" I asked.

""What do you think?" said he. "We'll make the coats of some of these soldiers redder than ever the tailor did."

""But they are armed," said I.

""And so shall we be, my boy. There's a brace of pistols for every mother's son of us, and if we can't carry this ship, with the crew at our back, it's time we were all sent to a young misses' boarding-school. You speak to your mate upon the left to-night, and see if he is to be trusted."

""I did so, and found my other neighbor to be a young fellow in much the same position as myself, whose crime had been forgery. His name was Evans, but he afterwards changed it, like myself, and he is now a rich and prosperous man in the south of England. He was ready enough to join the conspiracy, as the only means of saving ourselves, and before we had

crossed the Bay there were only two of the prisoners who were not in the secret. One of these was of weak mind, and we did not dare to trust him, and the other was suffering from jaundice, and could not be of any use to us.

"From the beginning there was really nothing to prevent us from taking possession of the ship. The crew were a set of ruffians, specially picked for the job. The sham chaplain came into our cells to exhort us, carrying a black bag, supposed to be full of tracts, and so often did he come that by the third day we had each stowed away at the foot of our beds a file, a brace of pistols, a pound of powder, and twenty slugs. Two of the warders were agents of Prendergast, and the second mate was his right-hand man. The captain, the two mates, two warders Lieutenant Martin, his eighteen soldiers, and the doctor were all that we had against us. Yet, safe as it was, we determined to neglect no precaution, and to make our attack suddenly by night. It came, however, more quickly than we expected, and in this way.

"One evening, about the third week after our start, the doctor had come down to see one of the prisoners who was ill, and putting his hand down on the bottom of his bunk he felt the outline of the pistols. If he had been silent he might have blown the whole thing, but he was a nervous little chap, so he gave a cry of surprise and turned so pale that the man knew what was up in an instant and seized him. He was gagged before he could give the alarm, and tied down upon the bed. He had unlocked the door that led to the deck, and we were through it in a rush. The two sentries were shot down, and so was a corporal who came running to see what was the matter. There were two more soldiers at the door of the state-room, and their muskets seemed not to be loaded, for they never fired upon us, and they were shot while trying to fix their bayonets. Then we rushed on into the captain's cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay with his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while the chaplain stood with a smoking pistol in his hand at his elbow. The two mates had both been seized by the crew, and the whole business seemed to be settled.

"The state-room was next the cabin, and we flocked in there and flopped down on the settees, all speaking together, for we were just mad with the feeling that we were free once more. There were lockers all round, and Wilson, the sham chaplain, knocked one of them in, and pulled out a dozen of brown sherry. We cracked off the necks of the bottles, poured the stuff out into tumblers, and were just tossing them off, when in an instant without warning there came the roar of muskets in our ears, and the saloon was so full of smoke that we could not see across the table. When it cleared again the place was a shambles. Wilson and eight others were wriggling on the top of each other on the floor, and the blood and the brown sherry on that table turn me sick now when I think of it. We were so cowed by the sight that I think we should have given the job up

if it had not been for Prendergast. He bellowed like a bull and rushed for the door with all that were left alive at his heels. Out we ran, and there on the poop were the lieutenant and ten of his men. The swing skylights above the saloon table had been a bit open, and they had fired on us through the slit. We got on them before they could load, and they stood to it like men; but we had the upper hand of them, and in five minutes it was all over. My God! Was there ever a slaughter-house like that ship! Prendergast was like a raging devil, and he picked the soldiers up as if they had been children and threw them overboard alive or dead. There was one sergeant that was horribly wounded and yet kept on swimming for a surprising time, until some one in mercy blew out his brains. When the fighting was over there was no one left of our enemies except just the warders the mates, and the doctor.

"It was over them that the great quarrel arose. There were many of us who were glad enough to win back our freedom, and yet who had no wish to have murder on our souls. It was one thing to knock the soldiers over with their muskets in their hands, and it was another to stand by while men were being killed in cold blood. Eight of us, five convicts and three sailors, said that we would not see it done. But there was no moving Prendergast and those who were with him. Our only chance of safety lay in making a clean job of it, said he, and he would not leave a tongue with power to wag in a witness-box. It nearly came to our sharing the fate of the prisoners, but at last he said that if we wished we might take a boat and go. We jumped at the offer, for we were already sick of these bloodthirsty doings, and we saw that there would be worse before it was done. We were given a suit of sailor togs each, a barrel of water, two casks, one of junk and one of biscuits, and a compass. Prendergast threw us over a chart, told us that we were shipwrecked mariners whose ship had foundered in Lat. 15 degrees and Long 25 degrees west, and then cut the painter and let us go.

"And now I come to the most surprising part of my story, my dear son. The seamen had hauled the fore-yard aback during the rising, but now as we left them they brought it square again, and as there was a light wind from the north and east the bark began to draw slowly away from us. Our boat lay, rising and falling, upon the long, smooth rollers, and Evans and I, who were the most educated of the party, were sitting in the sheets working out our position and planning what coast we should make for. It was a nice question, for the Cape de Verdes were about five hundred miles to the north of us, and the African coast about seven hundred to the east. On the whole, as the wind was coming round to the north, we thought that Sierra Leone might be best, and turned our head in that direction, the bark being at that time nearly hull down on our starboard quarter. Suddenly as we looked at her we saw a dense black cloud of smoke shoot up from her, which hung like a monstrous tree upon the sky line. A few seconds later a roar like thunder burst upon our ears, and as the smoke thinned away there was no sign left of the _Gloria Scott_. In an instant we swept the boat's head round again and

pulled with all our strength for the place where the haze still trailing over the water marked the scene of this catastrophe.

"It was a long hour before we reached it, and at first we feared that we had come too late to save any one. A splintered boat and a number of crates and fragments of spars rising and falling on the waves showed us where the vessel had foundered; but there was no sign of life, and we had turned away in despair when we heard a cry for help, and saw at some distance a piece of wreckage with a man lying stretched across it. When we pulled him aboard the boat he proved to be a young seaman of the name of Hudson, who was so burned and exhausted that he could give us no account of what had happened until the following morning.

"It seemed that after we had left, Prendergast and his gang had proceeded to put to death the five remaining prisoners. The two warders had been shot and thrown overboard, and so also had the third mate. Prendergast then descended into the 'tween-decks and with his own hands cut the throat of the unfortunate surgeon. There only remained the first mate, who was a bold and active man. When he saw the convict approaching him with the bloody knife in his hand he kicked off his bonds, which he had somehow contrived to loosen, and rushing down the deck he plunged into the after-hold. A dozen convicts, who descended with their pistols in search of him, found him with a match-box in his hand seated beside an open powder-barrel, which was one of a hundred carried on board, and swearing that he would blow all hands up if he were in any way molested. An instant later the explosion occurred, though Hudson thought it was caused by the misdirected bullet of one of the convicts rather than the mate's match. Be the cause what it may, it was the end of the _Gloria Scott_ and of the rabble who held command of her.

"Such, in a few words, my dear boy, is the history of this terrible business in which I was involved. Next day we were picked up by the brig _Hotspur_, bound for Australia, whose captain found no difficulty in believing that we were the survivors of a passenger ship which had foundered. The transport ship Gloria Scott was set down by the Admiralty as being lost at sea, and no word has ever leaked out as to her true fate. After an excellent voyage the _Hotspur_ landed us at Sydney, where Evans and I changed our names and made our way to the diggings, where, among the crowds who were gathered from all nations, we had no difficulty in losing our former identities. The rest I need not relate. We prospered, we traveled, we came back as rich colonials to England, and we bought country estates. For more than twenty years we have led peaceful and useful lives, and we hoped that our past was forever buried. Imagine, then, my feelings when in the seaman who came to us I recognized instantly the man who had been picked off the wreck. He had tracked us down somehow, and had set himself to live upon our fears. You will understand now how it was that I strove to keep the peace with him, and you will in some measure sympathize with me in the fears which fill me, now that he has gone from me to his other victim with threats upon

his tongue.'

"Underneath is written in a hand so shaky as to be hardly legible, 'Beddoes writes in cipher to say H. Has told all. Sweet Lord, have mercy on our souls!'

"That was the narrative which I read that night to young Trevor, and I think, Watson, that under the circumstances it was a dramatic one. The good fellow was heart-broken at it, and went out to the Terai tea planting, where I hear that he is doing well. As to the sailor and Beddoes, neither of them was ever heard of again after that day on which the letter of warning was written. They both disappeared utterly and completely. No complaint had been lodged with the police, so that Beddoes had mistaken a threat for a deed. Hudson had been seen lurking about, and it was believed by the police that he had done away with Beddoes and had fled. For myself I believe that the truth was exactly the opposite. I think that it is most probable that Beddoes, pushed to desperation and believing himself to have been already betrayed, had revenged himself upon Hudson, and had fled from the country with as much money as he could lay his hands on. Those are the facts of the case, Doctor, and if they are of any use to your collection, I am sure that they are very heartily at your service."

The Quest of Mr. Teaby

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Strangers and Wayfarers*, by Sarah Orne Jewett

The trees were bare on meadow and hill, and all about the country one saw the warm brown of lately fallen leaves. There was still a cheerful bravery of green in sheltered places,--a fine, live green that flattered the eye with its look of permanence; the first three quarters of the year seemed to have worked out their slow processes to make this perfect late-autumn day. In such weather I found even the East Wilby railroad station attractive, and waiting three hours for a slow train became a pleasure; the delight of idleness and even booklessness cannot be properly described.

The interior of the station was bleak and gravelly, but it would have been possible to find fault with any interior on such an out-of-doors day; and after the station-master had locked his ticket-office door and tried the handle twice, with a comprehensive look at me, he went slowly away up the road to spend some leisure time with his family. He had ceased to take any interest in the traveling public, and answered my questions as briefly as possible. After he had gone some distance he turned to look back, but finding that I still sat on the baggage truck in the sunshine, just where he left me, he smothered his natural apprehensions, and went on.

One might spend a good half hour in watching crows as they go southward resolutely through the clear sky, and then waver and come straggling back as if they had forgotten something; one might think over all one's immediate affairs, and learn to know the outward aspect of such a place as East Wilby as if born and brought up there. But after a while I lost interest in both past and future; there was too much landscape before me at the moment, and a lack of figures. The weather was not to be enjoyed merely as an end, yet there was no temptation to explore the up-hill road on the left, or the level fields on the right; I sat still on my baggage truck and waited for something to happen. Sometimes one is so happy that there is nothing left to wish for but to be happier, and just as the remembrance of this truth illuminated my mind, I saw two persons approaching from opposite directions. The first to arrive was a pleasant-looking elderly countrywoman, well wrapped in a worn winter cloak with a thick plaid shawl over it, and a white worsted cloud tied over her bonnet. She carried a well-preserved bandbox,--the outlines were perfect under its checked gingham cover,--and had a large bundle beside, securely rolled in a newspaper. From her dress I felt sure that she had made a mistake in dates, and expected winter to set in at once. Her face was crimson with undue warmth, and what appeared in the end to have been unnecessary haste. She did not take any notice of the elderly man who reached the platform a minute later, until they were near enough to

take each other by the hand and exchange most cordial greetings.

"Well, this is a treat!" said the man, who was a small and shivery-looking person. He carried a great umbrella and a thin, enameled-cloth valise, and wore an ancient little silk hat and a nearly new greenish linen duster, as if it were yet summer. "I was full o' thinkin' o' you day before yisterday; strange, wa'n't it?" he announced impressively, in a plaintive voice. "I was sayin' to myself, if there was one livin' bein' I coveted to encounter over East Wilby way, 't was you, Sister Pinkham."

"Warm to-day, ain't it?" responded Sister Pinkham. "How's your health, Mr. Teaby? I guess I'd better set right down here on the aide of the platform; sha'n't we git more air than if we went inside the depot? It's necessary to git my breath before I rise the hill."

"You can't seem to account for them foresights," continued Mr. Teaby, putting down his tall, thin valise and letting the empty top of it fold over. Then he stood his umbrella against the end of my baggage truck, without a glance at me. I was glad that they were not finding me in their way. "Well, if this ain't very sing'lar, I never saw nothin' that was," repeated the little man. "Nobody can set forth to explain why the thought of you should have been so borne in upon me day before yisterday, your livin' countenance an' all, an' here we be today settin' side o' one another. I've come to rely on them foresights; they've been of consider'ble use in my business, too."

"Trade good as common this fall?" inquired Sister Pinkham languidly. "You don't carry such a thing as a good palm-leaf fan amon'st your stuff, I expect? It does appear to me as if I hadn't been more het up any day this year."

"I should ha' had the observation to offer it before," said Mr. Teaby, with pride. "Yes, Sister Pinkham, I've got an excellent fan right here, an' you shall have it."

He reached for his bag; I heard a clink, as if there were bottles within. Presently his companion began to fan herself with that steady sway and lop of the palm-leaf which one sees only in country churches in midsummer weather. Mr. Teaby edged away a little, as if he feared such a steady trade-wind.

"We might ha' picked out a shadier spot, on your account," he suggested. "Can't you unpin your shawl?"

"Not while I'm so het," answered Sister Pinkham coldly. "Is there anything new recommended for rheumatic complaints?"

"They're gittin' up new compounds right straight along, and sends sights o' printed bills urg'in' of me to buy 'em. I don't beseech none o' my customers to take them strange nostrums that I ain't able to recommend."

"Some is new catches made o' the good old stand-bys, I expect," said Sister Pink-ham, and there was a comfortable silence of some minutes.

"I'm kind of surprised to meet with you to-day, when all's said an' done; it kind of started me when I see 't was you, after dwellin' on you so day before yisterday," insisted Mr. Teaby; and this time Sister Pinkham took heed of the interesting coincidence.

"Thinkin' o' me, was you?" and she stopped the fan a moment, and turned to look at him with interest.

"I was so. Well, I never see nobody that kep' her looks as you do, and be'n a sufferer too, as one may express it."

Sister Pinkham sighed heavily, and began to ply the fan again. "You was sayin' just now that you found them foresight notions work into your business."

"Yes'm; I saved a valu'ble life this last spring. I was puttin' up my vials to start out over Briggsville way, an' 't was impressed upon me that I'd better carry a portion o' opodildack. I was loaded up heavy, had all I could lug of spring goods; salts an' seny, and them big-bottle spring bitters o' mine that folks counts on regular. I couldn't git the opodildack out o' my mind noway, and I didn't want it for nothin' nor nobody, but I had to remove a needed vial o' some kind of essence to give it place. When I was goin' down the lane t'wards Abel Dean's house, his women folks come flyin' out. 'Child's a-dyin' in here,' says they; 'tumbled down the sullar stairs.' They was like crazy creatur's; I give 'em the vial right there in the lane, an' they run in an' I followed 'em. Last time I was there the child was a-playin' out; looked rugged and hearty. They've never forgot it an' never will," said Mr. Teaby impressively, with a pensive look toward the horizon. "Want me to stop over night with 'em any time, or come an' take the hoss, or anything. Mis' Dean, she buys four times the essences an' stuff she wants; kind o' gratified, you see, an' didn't want to lose the child, I expect, though she's got a number o' others. If it hadn't be'n for its bein' so impressed on my mind, I should have omitted that opodildack. I deem it a winter remedy, chiefly."

"Perhaps the young one would ha' come to without none; they do survive right through everything, an' then again they seem to be taken away right in their tracks." Sister Pinkham grew more talkative as she cooled. "Heard any news as you come along?"

"Some," vaguely responded Mr. Teaby. "Folks ginerally relates anythin' that's occurred since they see me before. I ain't no great hand for news, an' never was."

"Pity 'bout _you_, Uncle Teaby! There, anybody don't like to have deaths occur an' them things, and be unawares of 'em, an' the last to know when folks calls in." Sister Pinkham laughed at first, but said her say with spirit.

"Certain, certain, we ought all of us to show an interest. I did hear it reported that Elder Fry calculates to give up preachin' an' go into the creamery business another spring. You know he's had means left him, and his throat's kind o' give out; trouble with the pipes. I called it brown caters, an' explained nigh as I could without hurtin' of his pride that he'd bawled more 'n any pipes could stand. I git so wore out settin' under him that I feel to go an' lay right out in the woods arterwards, where it's still. 'T won't never do for him to deal so with callin' of his cows; they'd be so aggravated 't would be more 'n any butter business could bear."

"You hadn't ought to speak so light now; he's a very feelin' man towards any one in trouble," Sister Pinkham rebuked the speaker. "I set consider'ble by Elder Fry. You sort o' divert yourself dallying round the country with your essences and remedies, an' you ain't never sagged down with no settled grievance, as most do. Think o' what the Elder's be'n through, a-losin' o' three good wives. I'm one o' them that ain't found life come none too easy, an' Elder Fry's preachin' stayed my mind consider'ble."

"I s'pose you're right, if you think you be," acknowledged the little man humbly. "I can't say as I esteem myself so fortunate as most. I 'in a lonesome creatur', an' always was; you know I be. I did expect somebody 'd engage my affections before this."

"There, plenty 'd be glad to have ye."

"I expect they would, but I don't seem to be drawed to none on 'em," replied Mr. Teaby, with a mournful shake of his head. "I've spoke pretty decided to quite a number in my time, take 'em all together, but it always appeared best not to follow it up; an' so when I'd come their way again I'd laugh it off or somethin', in case 't was referred to. I see one now an' then that I kind o' fancy, but 't ain't the real thing."

"You mustn't expect to pick out a handsome gal, at your age," insisted Sister Pinkham, in a business-like way. "Time's past for all that, an' you've got the name of a rover. I've heard some say that you was rich, but that ain't every thin'. You must take who you can git, and look

you up a good home; I would. If you was to be taken down with any settled complaint, you'd be distressed to be without a place o' your own, an' I'm glad to have this chance to tell ye so. Plenty o' folks is glad to take you in for a short spell, an' you've had an excellent chance to look the ground over well. I tell you you're beginnin' to git along in years."

"I know I be," said Mr. Teaby. "I can't travel now as I used to. I have to favor my left leg. I do' know but I be spoilt for settlin' down. This business I never meant to follow stiddy, in the fust place; 't was a means to an end, as one may say."

"Folks would miss ye, but you could take a good long trip, say spring an' fall, an' live quiet the rest of the year. What if they do git out o' essence o' lemon an' pep'mint! There's sufficient to the stores; 't ain't as 't used to be when you begun."

"There's Ann Maria Hart, my oldest sister's daughter. I kind of call it home with her by spells and when the travelin' 's bad."

"Good King Agrippy! if that's the best you can do, I feel for you," exclaimed the energetic adviser. "She's a harmless creatur' and seems to keep ploddin, but slack ain't no description, an' runs on talkin' about nothin' till it strikes right in an' numbs ye. She's pressed for house room, too. Hart ought to put on an addition long ago, but he's too stingy to live. Folks was tellin' me that somebody observed to him how he'd got a real good, stiddy man to work with him this summer. 'He's called a very pious man, too, great hand in meetin's, Mr. Hart,' says they; an' says he, 'I'd have you rec'lect he's a-prayin' out o' my time!' Said it hasty, too, as if he meant it."

"Well, I can put up with Hart; he's near, but he uses me well, an' I try to do the same by him. I don't bange on 'em; I pay my way, an' I feel as if everything was temp'rary. I did plan to go way over North Dexter way, where I've never be'n, an' see if there wa'n't somebody, but the weather ain't be'n settled as I could wish. I'm always expectin' to find her, I be so,"--at which I observed Sister Pinkham's frame shake.

I felt a slight reproach of conscience at listening so intently to these entirely private affairs, and at this point reluctantly left my place and walked along the platform, to remind Sister Pinkham and confiding Mr. Teaby of my neighborhood. They gave no sign that there was any objection to the presence of a stranger, and so I came back gladly to the baggage truck, and we all kept silence for a little while. A fine flavor of extracts was wafted from the valise to where I sat. I pictured to myself the solitary and hopeful wanderings of Mr. Teaby. There was an air about him of some distinction; he might have been a decayed member of the medical profession. I observed that

his hands were unhardened by any sort of rural work, and he sat there a meek and appealing figure, with his antique hat and linen duster, beside the well-wadded round shoulders of friendly Sister Pinkham. The expression of their backs was most interesting.

"You might express it that I've got quite a number o' good homes; I've got me sorted out a few regular places where I mostly stop," Mr. Teaby explained presently. "I like to visit with the old folks an' speak o' the past together; an' the boys an' gals, they always have some kind o' fun goin' on when I git along. They always have to git me out to the barn an' tell me, if they're a-courtin', and I fetch an' carry for 'em in that case, an' help out all I can. I've made peace when they got into some o' their misunderstanding, an' them times they set a good deal by Uncle Teaby; but they ain't all got along as well as they expected, and that's be'n one thing that's made me desirous not to git fooled myself. But I do' know as folks would be reconciled to my settlin' down in one place. I've gathered a good many extry receipts for things, an' folks all calls me somethin' of a doctor; you know my grand'ther was one, on my mother's side."

"Well, you've had my counsel for what 't is wuth," said the woman, not unkindly. "Trouble is, you want better bread than's made o' wheat."

"I'm 'most ashamed to ask ye again if 't would be any use to lay the matter before Hannah Jane Pinkham?" This was spoken lower, but I could hear the gentle suggestion.

"I'm obleeged to you," said the lady of Mr. Teaby's choice, "but I ain't the right one. Don't you go to settin' your mind on me: 't ain't wuth while. I'm older than you be, an' apt to break down with my rheumatic complaints. You don't want nobody on your hands. I'd git a younger woman, I would so."

"I've be'n a-lookin' for the right one a sight o' years, Hannah Jane. I've had a kind o' notion I should know her right off when I fust see her, but I'm afeared it ain't goin' to be that way. I've seen a sight o' nice, smart women, but when the thought o' you was so impressed on my mind day before yisterday"--

"I'm sorry to disobleege you, but if I have anybody, I'm kind o' half promised to Elder Fry," announced Sister Pinkham bravely. "I consider it more on the off side than I did at first. If he'd continued preachin' I'd favor it more, but I dread havin' to 'tend to a growin' butter business an' to sense them new machines. 'T ain't as if he'd 'stablished it. I've just begun to have things easy; but there, I feel as if I had a lot o' work left in me, an' I don't know's 't is right to let it go to waste. I expect the Elder would preach some, by spells, an' we could ride about an' see folks; an' he'd always be called to funerals, an' have some variety one way an' another. I urge

him not to quit preachin'."

"I'd rather he undertook 'most anythin' else," said Mr. Teaby, rising and trying to find the buttons of his linen duster.

I could see a bitter shade of jealousy cloud his amiable face; but Sister Pinkham looked up at him and laughed. "Set down, set down," she said. "We ain't in no great hurry;" and Uncle Teaby relented, and lingered. "I'm all out o' rose-water for the eyes," she told him, "an' if you've got a vial o' lemon left that you'll part with reasonable, I do' know but I'll take that. I'd rather have caught you when you was outward bound; your bag looks kind o' slim."

"Everythin' 's fresh-made just before I started, 'cept the ginger, an' that I buy, but it's called the best there is."

The two sat down and drove a succession of sharp bargains, but finally parted the best of friends. Mr. Teaby kindly recognized my presence from a business point of view, and offered me a choice of his wares at reasonable prices. I asked about a delightful jumping-jack which made its appearance, and wished very much to become the owner, for it was curiously whittled out and fitted together by Mr. Teaby's own hands. He exhibited the toy to Sister Pinkham and me, to our great pleasure, but scorned to sell such a trifle, it being worth nothing; and beside, he had made it for a little girl who lived two miles farther along the road he was following. I could see that she was a favorite of the old man's, and said no more about the matter, but provided myself, as recommended, with an ample package of court-plaster, "in case of accident before I got to where I was going," and a small bottle of smelling-salts, described as reviving to the faculties.

Then we watched Mr. Teaby plod away, a quaint figure, with his large valise nearly touching the ground as it hung slack from his right hand. The greenish-brown duster looked bleak and unseasonable as a cloud went over the sun; it appeared to symbolize the youthful and spring-like hopes of the wearer, decking the autumn days of life.

"Poor creatur'!" said Sister Pinkham. "There, he doos need somebody to look after him."

She turned to me frankly, and I asked how far he was going.

"Oh, he'll put up at that little gal's house an' git his dinner, and give her the jumpin'-jack an' trade a little; an' then he'll work along the road, callin' from place to place. He's got a good deal o' system, an' was a smart boy, so that folks expected he was goin' to make a doctor, but he kind o' petered out. He's long-winded an' harpin', an' some folks prays him by if they can; but there, most likes him, an' there's nobody would be more missed. He don't make no

trouble for 'em; he'll take right holt an' help, and there ain't nobody more gentle with the sick. Always has some o' his nonsense over to me."

This was added with sudden consciousness that I must have heard the recent conversation, but we only smiled at each other, and good Sister Pinkham did not seem displeased. We both turned to look again at the small figure of Mr. Teaby, as he went away, with his queer, tripping gait, along the level road.

"Pretty day, if 't wa'n't quite so warm," said Sister Pinkham, as she rose and reached for her bandbox and bundle, to resume her own journey. "There, if here ain't Uncle Teaby's umbrilla! He forgits everything that belongs to him but that old valise. Folks wouldn't know him if he left that. You may as well just hand it to Asa Briggs, the depot-master, when he gits back. Like's not the old gentleman 'll think to call for it as he comes back along. Here's his fan, too, but he won't be likely to want that this winter."

She looked at the large umbrella; there was a great deal of good material in it, but it was considerably out of repair.

"I don't know but I'll stop an' mend it up for him, poor old creatur'," she said slowly, with an apologetic look at me. Then she sat down again, pulled a large rolled-up needlebook from her deep and accessible pocket, and sewed busily for some time with strong stitches.

I sat by and watched her, and was glad to be of use in chasing her large spool of linen thread, which repeatedly rolled away along the platform. Sister Pinkham's affectionate thoughts were evidently following her old friend.

"I've a great mind to walk back with the umbrilla; he may need it, an' 't ain't a great ways," she said to me, and then looked up quickly, blushing like a girl. I wished she would, for my part, but it did not seem best for a stranger to give advice in such serious business. "I'll tell you what I will do," she told me innocently, a moment afterwards. "I'll take the umbrilla along with me, and leave word with Asa Briggs I've got it. I go right by his house, so you needn't charge your mind nothin' about it."

By the time she had taken off her gold-bowed spectacles and put them carefully away and was ready to make another start, she had learned where I came from and where I was going and what my name was, all this being but poor return for what I had gleaned of the history of herself and Mr. Teaby. I watched Sister Pinkham until she disappeared, umbrella in hand, over the crest of a hill far along the road to the

eastward.

THE SISTERS QITA

from: The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Tales of the Five Towns*, by Arnold Bennett

When I had finished my daily personal examination of the ropes and-trapezes, I hesitated a moment, and then climbed up again, to the roof, where the red and the blue long ropes were fastened. I took my sharp scissors from my chatelaine, and gently fretted the blue rope with one blade of the scissors until only a single strand was left intact. I gazed down at the vast floor a hundred feet below. The afternoon varieties were over, and a phrenologist was talking to a small crowd of gapers in a corner. The rest of the floor was pretty empty save for the chairs and the fancy stalls, and the fatigued stall-girls in their black dresses. I too, had once almost been a stall-girl at the Aquarium! I descended. Few observed me 244 in my severe street dress. Our secretary, Charles, attended me on the stage.

'Everything right, Miss Paquita?' he said, handing me my hat and gloves, which I had given him, to hold.

I nodded. I could see that he thought I was in one of my stern, far-away moods.

'Miss Mariquita is waiting for you in the carriage,' he said.

We drove away in silence—I with my inborn melancholy too sad, Sally (Mariquita) too happy to speak. This daily afternoon drive was really part of our 'turn'! A team of four mules driven by a negro will make a sensation even in Regent Street. All London looked at us, and contrasted our impassive beauty—mine mature (too mature!) and dark, Sally's so blonde and youthful, our simple costumes, and the fact that we stayed at an exclusive Mayfair hotel, with the stupendous flourish of our turnout. The renowned Sisters Qita—Paquita and Mariquita Qita—and the renowned mules of the Sisters Qita! Two hundred pounds a week at the Aquarium! Twenty-five thousand francs for one month at the Casino de Paris! Twelve thousand five hundred dollars for a tour of fifty 245 performances in the States! Fifteen hundred pesos a night and a special train de luxe in Argentina and Brazil! I could see the loungers and the drivers talking and pointing as usual. The gilded loungers in Verrey's café got up and watched us through the windows as we passed. This was fame. For nearly twenty years I had been intimate with fame, and with the envy of women and the foolish homage of men.

We saw dozens of omnibuses bearing the legend 'Qita.' Then we met one which said: 'Empire Theatre. Valdès, the matchless juggler,' and Sally smiled with pleasure.

'He's coming to see our turn to-night, after his,' she remarked, blushing.

'Valdès? Why?' I asked, without turning my head.

'He wants us to sup with him, to celebrate our engagement.'

'When do you mean to get married?' I asked her shortly. I felt quite calm.

'I guess you're a Tartar to-day,' said the pretty thing, with a touch of her American sauciness. 'We haven't studied it out yet. It was only yesterday afternoon he kissed me for the first time.' Then she bent towards me 246 with her characteristic plaintive, wistful appeal. 'Say! You aren't vexed, Selina, are you,

because of this? Of course, he wants me to tour with him after we're married, and do a double act. He's got lots of dandy ideas for a double act. But I won't, I won't, Selina, unless you say the word. Now, don't you go and be cross, Selina.'

I let myself expand generously.

'My darling girl!' I said, glancing at her kindly. 'You ought to know me better. Of course I'm not cross. And of course you must tour with Valdès. I shall be all right. How do you suppose I managed before I invented you?' I smiled like an indulgent mother.

'Oh! I didn't mean that,' she said. 'I know you're frightfully clever. I'm nothing——'

'I hope you'll be awfully happy,' I whispered, squeezing her hand. 'And don't forget that I introduced him to you—I knew him years before you did. I'm the cause of this bliss——Do you remember that cold morning in Berlin?'

'Oh! well, I should say!' she exclaimed in ecstasy.

When we reached our rooms in the hotel I 247 kissed her warmly. Women do that sort of thing.

Then a card was brought to me. 'George Capey,' it said; and in pencil, 'Of the Five Towns.'

I shrugged my shoulders. Sally had gone to scribble a note to her Valdès. 'Show Mr. Capey in,' I said, and a natty young man entered, half nervousness, half audacity.

'How did you know I come from the Five Towns?' I questioned him.

'I am on the Evening Mail,' he said, 'where they know everything, madam.'

I was annoyed. 'Then they know, on the Evening Mail that Paquita Qita has never been interviewed, and never will be,' I said.

'Besides,' he went on, 'I come from the Five Towns myself.'

'Bursley?' I asked mechanically.

'Bursley,' he ejaculated; then added, 'you haven't been near old Bosley since——'

It was true.

'No,' I said hastily. 'It is many years since I have been in England, even. Do they know down there who Qita is?'

'Not they!' he replied.

248 I grew reflective. Stars such as I have no place of origin. We shoot up out of a void, and sink back into a void. I had forgotten Bursley and Bursley folk. Recollections rushed in upon me.... I felt beautifully sad. I drew off my gloves, and flung my hat on a chair with a movement that would have bewitched a man of the world, but Mr. George Capey was unimpressed. I laughed.

'What's the joke?' he inquired. I adored him for his Bursliness.

'I was just thinking, of fat Mrs. Cartledge, who used to keep that fishmonger's shop in Oldcastle Street, opposite Bates's. I wonder if she's still there?'

'She is,' he said. 'And fatter than ever! She's getting on in years now.'

I broke the rule of a lifetime, and let him interview me.

'Tell them I'm thirty-seven,' I said. 'Yes, I mean it. Tell them.'

And then for another tit-bit I explained to him how I had discovered Sally at Koster and Bial's, in New York, five years ago, and made her my sister for stage purposes because I was lonely, and liked her American simplicity and 249 twang. He departed full of tea and satisfaction.

It was our last night at the Aquarium. The place was crammed. The houses where I performed were always crammed. Our turn was in three parts, and lasted half an hour. The first part was a skirt dance in full afternoon dress (*danse de modernité*, I called it); the second was a double horizontal bar act; the third was the famous act of the red and the blue ropes, in full evening dress. It was 10.45 when we climbed the silk ladders for the third part. High up in the roof, separated from each other by nearly the length of the great hall, Sally and I stood on two little platforms. I held the ends of the red and the blue ropes. I had to let the blue rope swing across the hall to her. She would seize it, and, clutching it, swoop like the ball of an enormous pendulum from her platform to mine. (But would she?) I should then swing on the red rope to the platform she had left.

Then the band would stop for the thrilling moment, and the lights would be lowered. Each lighting and holding a powerful electric 250 hand-light—one red, one blue—we should signal the drummer and plunge simultaneously into space, flash past each other in mid-flight, exchanging lights as we passed (this was the trick), and soar to opposite platforms again, amid frenzied applause. There were no nets.

That was what ought to occur.

I stood bowing to the floor of tiny upturned heads, and jerking the ropes a little. Then I let Sally's rope go with a push, and it dropped away from me, and in a few seconds she had it safe in her strong hand. She was taller than me, with a fuller figure, yet she looked quite small on her distant platform. All the evening I had been thinking of fat old Mrs. Cartledge messing and slopping among cod and halibut on white tiles. I could not get Bursley and my silly infancy out of my head. I followed my feverish career from the age of fifteen, when that strange Something in me, which makes an artist, had first driven me forth to conquer two continents. I thought of all the golden loves I had scorned, and my own love, which had been ignored, unnoticed, but which still obstinately burned. I glanced downwards and descried Valdès precisely where Sally had 251 said he would be. Valdès, what a fool you were! And I hated a fool. I am one of those who can love and hate, who can love and despise, who can love and loathe the same object in the same moment. Then I signalled to Sally to plunge, and my eyes filled with tears. For, you see, somehow, in some senseless sentimental way, the thought of fat Mrs. Cartledge and my silly infancy had forced me to send Sally the red rope, not the blue one. We exchanged ropes on

alternate nights, but this was her night for the blue one.

She swung over, alighting accurately at my side with that exquisite outward curve of the spine which had originally attracted me to her.

'You sent me the red one,' she said to me, after she had acknowledged the applause.

'Yes,' I said. 'Never mind; stick to it now you've got it. Here's the red light. Have you seen Valdès?'

She nodded.

I took the blue light and clutched the blue rope. Instead of murder—suicide, since it must be one or the other. And why not? Indeed, I censured myself in that second for having 252 meant to kill Sally. Not because I was ashamed of the sin, but because the revenge would have been so pitiful and weak. If Valdès the matchless was capable of passing me over and kneeling to the pretty thing——

I stood ready. The world was to lose that fineness, that distinction, that originality, that disturbing subtlety, which constituted Paquita Qita. I plunged.

... I was on the other platform. The rope had held, then: I remembered nothing of the flight except that I had passed near the upturned, pleasant face of Valdès.

The band stopped. The lights of the hall were lowered. All was dark. I switched on my dazzling blue light; Sally switched on her red one. I stood ready. The rope could not possibly endure a second strain. I waved to Sally and signalled to the conductor. The world was to lose Paquita. The drum began its formidable roll. Whirrr! I plunged, and saw the red star rushing towards me. I snatched it and soared upwards. The blue rope seemed to tremble. As I came near the platform at decreasing speed, it seemed to stretch like elastic. It broke! The platform 253 jumped up suddenly over my head, but I caught at the silk ladder. I was saved! There was a fearful silence, and then the appalling shock of hysterical applause from seven thousand throats. I slid down the ladder, ran across the stage into my dressing-room for a cloak, out again into the street. In two days I was in Buda-Pesth.

AN EXCHANGE OF COURTESIES

from: Project Gutenberg's *The Law-Breakers and Other Stories*, by Robert Grant

I

In the opinion of many persons competent to judge, "The Beaches" was suffering from an invasion of wealth. Unquestionably it had been fashionable for a generation; but the people who had established summer homes there were inhabitants of the large neighboring city which they forsook during five months in the year to enjoy the ocean breezes and sylvan scenery, for The Beaches afforded both. Well-to-do New England families of refinement and taste, they enjoyed in comfort, without ostentation, their picturesque surroundings. Their cottages were simple; but each had its charming outlook to sea and a sufficient number of more or less wooded acres to command privacy and breathing space. In the early days the land had sold for a song, but it had risen steadily with the times, as more and more people coveted a foothold. The last ten years had introduced many changes; the older houses had been pulled down and replaced by lordly structures with all the modern conveniences, including spacious stables and farm buildings. Two clubs had been organized along the six miles of coast to provide golf and tennis, afternoon teas and bridge whist for the entertainment of the colony. The scale of living had become more elaborate, and there had been many newcomers--people of large means who offered for the finest sites sums which the owners could not afford to refuse. The prices paid in several instances represented ten times the original outlay. All the desirable locations were held by proprietors fully aware of their value, and those bent on purchase must pay what was asked or go without.

Then had occurred the invasion referred to--the coming to The Beaches of the foreign contingent, so called: people of fabulous means, multi-millionaires who were captains in one or another form of industry and who sought this resort as a Mecca for the social uplifting of their families and protection against summer heat. At their advent prices made another jump--one which took the breath away. Several of the most conservative owners parted with their estates after naming a figure which they supposed beyond the danger point, and half a dozen second-rate situations, affording but a paltry glimpse of the ocean, were snapped up in eager competition by wealthy capitalists from Chicago, Pittsburg, and St. Louis who had set their hearts on securing the best there was remaining.

Among the late comers was Daniel Anderson, known as the furniture king in the jargon of trade, many times a millionaire, and comparatively a person of leisure through the sale of his large plants to a trust. He hired for the season, by long-distance telephone, at an amazing rental, one of the more desirable places which was to let on account of the purpose of its owners to spend the summer abroad. It was one of the newer houses, large and commodious; yet its facilities were severely taxed by the Anderson establishment, which fairly bristled with complexity. Horses by the score, vehicles manifold, a steam yacht, and three automobiles were the more striking symbols of a manifest design to curry favor by force of outdoing the neighborhood.

The family consisted of Mrs. Anderson, who was nominally an invalid, and a son and daughter of marriageable age. If it be stated that they were chips of the old block, meaning their father, it must not be understood that he had reached the moribund stage. On the contrary, he was still in the prime of his energy, and, with the exception of the housekeeping details, set in motion and directed the machinery of the establishment.

It had been his idea to come to The Beaches; and having found a foothold there he was determined to make the most of the opportunity not only for his children but himself. With his private secretary and typewriter at his elbow he matured his scheme of carrying everything before him socially as he had done in business. The passport to success in this new direction he assumed to be lavish expenditure. It was a favorite maxim of his--trite yet shrewdly entertained--that money will buy anything, and every man has his price. So he began by subscribing to everything, when asked, twice as much as any one else, and seeming to regard it as a privilege. Whoever along The Beaches was interested in charity had merely to present a subscription list to Mr. Anderson to obtain a liberal donation. The equivalent was acquaintance. The man or woman who asked him for money could not very well neglect to bow the next time they met, and so by the end of the first summer he was on speaking terms with most of the men and many of the women. Owing to his generosity, the fund for the building of a new Episcopal church was completed, although he belonged to a different denomination. He gave a drinking fountain for horses and dogs, and when the selectmen begrudged to the summer residents the cost of rebuilding two miles of road, Daniel Anderson defrayed the expense from his own pocket. An ardent devotee of golf, and daily on the links, he presented toward the end of the season superb trophies for the competition of both men and women, with the promise of others in succeeding years. In short, he gave the society whose favor he coveted to understand that it had merely "to press the button" and he would do the rest.

Mr. Andersen's nearest neighbors were the Misses Ripley--Miss Rebecca and Miss Caroline, or Carry, as she was invariably called. They were

among the oldest summer residents, for their father had been among the first to recognize the attractions of The Beaches, and their childhood had been passed there. Now they were middle-aged women and their father was dead; but they continued to occupy season after season their cottage, the location of which was one of the most picturesque on the whole shore. The estate commanded a wide ocean view and included some charming woods on one side and a small, sandy, curving beach on the other. The only view of the water which the Andersons possessed was at an angle across this beach. The house they occupied, though twice the size of the Ripley cottage, was virtually in the rear of the Ripley domain, which lay tantalizingly between them and a free sweep of the landscape.

One morning, early in October of the year of Mr. Anderson's advent to The Beaches, the Ripley sisters, who were sitting on the piazza enjoying the mellow haze of the autumn sunshine, saw, with some surprise, Mr. David Walker, the real-estate broker, approaching across the lawn--surprise because it was late in the year for holidays, and Mr. Walker invariably went to town by the half-past eight train. Yet a visit from one of their neighbors was always agreeable to them, and the one in question lived not more than a quarter of a mile away and sometimes did drop in at afternoon tea-time. Certain women might have attempted an apology for their appearance, but Miss Rebecca seemed rather to glory in the shears which dangled down from her apron-strings as she rose to greet her visitor; they told so unmistakably that she had been enjoying herself trimming vines. Miss Carry--who was still kittenish in spite of her forty years--as she gave one of her hands to Mr. Walker held out with the other a basket of seckel pears she had been gathering, and said:

"Have one--do."

Mr. Walker complied, and, having completed the preliminary commonplaces, said, as he hurled the core with an energetic sweep of his arm into the ocean at the base of the little bluff on which the cottage stood:

"There is no place on the shore which quite compares with this."

"We agree with you," said Miss Rebecca with dogged urbanity. "Is any one of a different opinion?"

"On the contrary, I have come to make you an offer for it. It isn't usual for real-estate men to crack up the properties they wish to purchase, but I am not afraid of doing so in this case." He spoke buoyantly, as though he felt confident that he was in a position to carry his point.

"An offer?" said Miss Rebecca. "For our place? You know that we have

no wish to sell. We have been invited several times to part with it, and declined. It was you yourself who brought the last invitation. We are still in the same frame of mind, aren't we, Carry?"

"Yes, indeed. Where should we get another which we like so well?"

"My principal invites you to name your own figure."

"That is very good of him, I'm sure. Who is he, by the way?"

"I don't mind telling you; it's your neighbor, Daniel Anderson." David Walker smiled significantly. "He is ready to pay whatever you choose to ask."

"Our horses are afraid of his automobiles, and his liveried grooms have turned the head of one of our maids. Our little place is not in the market, thank you, Mr. Walker."

The broker's beaming countenance showed no sign of discouragement. He rearranged the gay blue flower which had almost detached itself from the lapel of his coat, then said laconically:

"I am authorized by Mr. Anderson to offer you \$500,000 for your property."

"What?" exclaimed Miss Rebecca.

"Half a million dollars for six acres," he added.

"The man must be crazy." Miss Rebecca stepped to the honeysuckle vine with a detached air and snipped off a straggling tendril with her shears. "That is a large sum of money," she added.

David Walker enjoyed the effect of his announcement; it was clear that he had produced an impression.

"Money is no object to him. I told him that you did not wish to sell, and he said that he would make it worth your while."

"Half a million dollars! We should be nearly rich," let fall Miss Carry, upon whom the full import of the offer was breaking.

"Yes; and think what good you two ladies could do with all that money--practical good," continued the broker, pressing his opportunity and availing himself of his knowledge of their aspirations. "You could buy elsewhere and have enough left over to endow a professorship at Bryn Mawr, Miss Rebecca; and you, Miss Carry, would be able to revel in charitable donations."

Those who knew the Ripley sisters well were aware that plain speaking never vexed them. Beating about the bush from artificiality or ignoring a plain issue was the sort of thing they resented. Consequently, the directness of David Walker's sally did not appear to them a liberty, but merely a legitimate summing up of the situation. Miss Rebecca was the spokesman as usual, though her choice was always governed by what she conceived to be the welfare of her sister, whom she still looked on as almost a very young person. Sitting upright and clasping her elbows, as she was apt to do in moments of stress, she replied:

"Money is money, Mr. Walker, and half a million dollars is not to be discarded lightly. We should be able, as you suggest, to do some good with so much wealth. But, on the other hand, we don't need it, and we have no one dependent on us for support. My brother is doing well and is likely to leave his only child all that is good for her. We love this place. Caroline may marry some day" (Miss Carry laughed protestingly at the suggestion and ejaculated, "Not very likely"), "but I never shall. I expect to come here as long as I live. We love every inch of the place--the woods, the beach, the sea. Our garden, which we made ourselves, is our delight. Why should we give up all this because some one offers us five times what we supposed it to be worth? My sister is here to speak for herself, but so far as I am concerned you may tell Mr. Anderson that if our place is worth so much as that we cannot afford to part with it."

"Oh, no, it wouldn't do at all! Our heartstrings are round the roots of these trees, Mr. Walker," added the younger sister in gentle echo of this determination.

"Don't be in a hurry to decide; think it over. It will bear reflection," said the broker briskly.

"There's nothing to think over. It becomes clearer every minute," said Miss Rebecca a little tartly. Then she added: "I dare say it will do him good to find that some one has something which he cannot buy."

"He will be immensely disappointed, for his heart was set on it," said David Walker gloomily. His emotions were not untinged by personal dismay, for his commission would have been a large one.

He returned forthwith to his client, who was expecting him, and who met him at the door.

"Well, Walker, what did the maiden ladies say? Have one of these," he exclaimed, exhibiting some large cigars elaborately wrapped in gold foil. "They're something peculiarly choice which a friend of mine--a Cuban--obtained for me."

"They won't sell, Mr. Anderson."

The furniture king frowned. He was a heavily built but compact man who looked as though he were accustomed to butt his way through life and sweep away opposition, yet affable and easy-going withal.

"They won't sell? You offered them my price?"

"It struck them as prodigious, but they were not tempted."

"I've got to have it somehow. With this land added to theirs I should have the finest place on the shore."

The broker disregarded this flamboyant remark, which was merely a repetition of what he had heard several times already. "I warned you," he said, "that they might possibly refuse even this munificent offer. They told me to tell you that if it was worth so much they could not afford to sell."

"Is it not enough? They're poor, you told me--poor as church mice."

"Compared with you. But they have enough to live on simply, and--and to be able to maintain such an establishment as yours, for instance, would not add in the least degree to their happiness. On the contrary, it is because they delight in the view and the woods and their little garden just as they see them that they can't afford to let you have the place." Now that the chances of a commission were slipping away David Walker was not averse to convey in delicate language the truth which Miss Rebecca had set forth.

Mr. Anderson felt his chin meditatively. "I seem to be up against it," he murmured. "You think they are not holding out for a higher figure?" he asked shrewdly.

David shook his head. Yet he added, with the instinct of a business man ready to nurse a forlorn hope, "There would be no harm in trying. I don't believe, though, that you have the ghost of a chance."

The furniture king reflected a moment. "I'll walk down there this afternoon and make their acquaintance."

"A good idea," said Walker, contented to shift the responsibility of a second offer. "You'll find them charming--real thoroughbreds," he saw fit to add.

"A bit top-lofty?" queried the millionaire.

"Not in the least. But they have their own standards, Mr. Anderson."

The furniture king's progress at The Beaches had been so uninterrupted on the surface and so apparently satisfactory to himself that no one would have guessed that he was not altogether content with it. With all his easy-going optimism, it had not escaped his shrewd intelligence that his family still lacked the social recognition he desired. People were civil enough, but there were houses into which they were never asked in spite of all his spending; and he was conscious that they were kept at arm's length by polite processes too subtle to be openly resented. Yet he did resent in his heart the check to his ambitions, and at the same time he sought eagerly the cause with an open mind. It had already dawned on him that when he was interested in a topic his voice was louder than the voices of his new acquaintances. He had already given orders to his chauffeur that the automobiles should be driven with some regard for the public safety. Lately the idea had come to him, and he had imparted it to his son, that the habit of ignoring impediments did not justify them in driving golf balls on the links when, the players in front of them were slower than they liked.

On the way to visit the Misses Ripley later in the day the broker's remark that they had standards of their own still lingered in his mind. He preferred to think of them and others along the shore as stiff and what he called top lofty; yet he intended to observe what he saw. He had been given to understand that these ladies were almost paupers from his point of view; and, though when he had asked who they were, David Walker had described them as representatives of one of the oldest and most respected families, he knew that they took no active part in the social life of the colony as he beheld it; they played neither golf, tennis, nor bridge at the club; they owned no automobile, and their stable was limited to two horses; they certainly cut no such figure as seemed to him to become people in their position, who could afford to refuse \$500,000 for six acres.

He was informed by the middle-aged, respectable-looking maid that the ladies were in the garden behind the house. A narrow gravelled path bordered with fragrant box led him to this. Its expanse was not large, but the luxuriance and variety of the old-fashioned summer flowers attested the devotion bestowed upon them. At the farther end was a trellised summer-house in which he perceived that the maiden ladies were taking afternoon tea. There was no sign of hothouse roses or rare exotic plants, but he noticed a beehive, a quaint sundial with an inscription, and along the middle path down which he walked were at intervals little dilapidated busts or figures of stone on pedestals--some of them lacking tips of noses or ears. It did not occur to Mr. Anderson that antiquity rather than poverty was responsible for these ravages. Their existence gave him fresh hope.

"Who can this be?" said Miss Carry with a gentle flutter. An unknown, middle-aged man was still an object of curiosity to her.

Miss Rebecca raised her eyeglass. "I do believe, my dear, that it's--yes, it is."

"But who?" queried Miss Carry.

Miss Rebecca rose instead of answering. The stranger was upon them, walking briskly and hat in hand. His manner was distinctly breezy--more so than a first meeting would ordinarily seem to her to justify.

"Good afternoon, ladies. Daniel Anderson is my name. My wife wasn't lucky enough to find you at home when she returned your call, so I thought I'd be neighborly."

"It's very good of you to come to see us," said Miss Rebecca, relenting at once. She liked characters--being something of one herself--and her neighbor's heartiness was taking. "This is my sister, Miss Caroline Ripley," she added to cement the introduction, "and I am Rebecca. Sit down, Mr. Anderson; and may I give you a cup of tea?"

Four people were apt to be cosily crowded in the summer-house. Being only a third person, the furniture king was able to settle himself in his seat and look around him without fear that his legs would molest any one. He gripped the arms of his chair and inhaled the fragrance of the garden.

"This is a lovely place, ladies," he asserted.

"Those hollyhocks and morning-glories and mignonettes take me back to old times. Up to my place it's all roses and orchids. But my wife told me last week that she heard old-fashioned flowers are coming in again. Seems she was right."

"Oh, but we've had old-fashioned flowers for years! Our garden has been always just like this--only becoming a little prettier all the time, we venture to hope," said Miss Carry.

"I want to know!" said Mr. Anderson; and almost immediately he remembered that both his son and daughter had cautioned him against the use of this phrase at The Beaches. He received the dainty but evidently ancient cup from Miss Rebecca, and seeing that the subject was, so to speak, before the house, he tasted his tea and said:

"It's all pretty here--garden, view, and beach. And I hear you decline to sell, ladies."

Miss Rebecca had been musing on the subject all day, and a heartfelt response rose promptly to her lips--spoken with the simple grace of a

self-respecting gentlewoman:

"Why should we sell, Mr. Anderson?"

The question was rather a poser to answer categorically; yet the would-be purchaser felt that he sufficiently conveyed his meaning when he said:

"I thought I might have made it worth your while."

"We are people of small means in the modern sense of the word," Miss Rebecca continued, thereby expressing more concretely his idea; "yet we have sufficient for our needs. Our tastes are very simple. The sum which you offered us is a fortune in itself--but we have no ambition for great wealth or to change our mode of life. Our associations with this place are so intimate and tender that money could not induce us to desecrate them by a sale."

"I see," said Mr. Anderson. Light was indeed breaking on him. At the same time his appreciation of the merits of the property had been growing every minute. It was an exquisite autumn afternoon. From where they sat he could behold the line of shore on either side with its background of dark green woods. Below the wavelets lapped the shingle with melodious rhythm. As far as the eye could see lay the bosom of the ocean unruffled, and lustrous with the sheen of the dying day. Accustomed to prevail in buying his way, he could not resist saying, after a moment of silence:

"If I were to increase my offer to a million would it make any difference in your attitude?"

A suppressed gurgle of mingled surprise and amusement escaped Miss Carry.

Miss Rebecca paused a moment by way of politeness to one so generous. But her tone when she spoke was unequivocal, and a shade sardonic.

"Not the least, Mr. Anderson. To tell the truth, we should scarcely understand the difference."

II

One summer afternoon two years later the Ripley sisters were again drinking tea in their attractive summer-house. In the interval the peaceful current of their lives had been stirred to its depths by

unlooked-for happenings. Very shortly after their refusal of Mr. Anderson's offer, their only brother, whose home was on the Hudson within easy distance of New York, had died suddenly. He was a widower; and consequently the protection of his only daughter straightway devolved on them. She was eighteen and good-looking. This they knew from personal observation at Thanksgiving Day and other family reunions; but owing to the fact that Mabel Ripley had been quarantined by scarlet fever during the summer of her sixteenth year, and in Europe the following summer, they were conscious, prior to her arrival at The Beaches, that they were very much in the dark as to her characteristics.

She proved to be the antipodes of what they had hoped for. Their traditions had depicted a delicate-appearing girl with reserved manners and a studious or artistic temperament, who would take an interest in the garden and like nothing better than to read aloud to them the new books while they did fancy-work. A certain amount of coy coquetry was to be expected--would be welcomed, in fact, for there were too many Miss Ripleys already. Proper facilities would be offered to her admirers, but they took for granted that she would keep them at a respectful distance as became a gentlewoman. She would be urged to take suitable exercise; they would provide a horse, if necessary; and doubtless some of the young people in the neighborhood would invite her occasionally to play tennis.

Mabel's enthusiasm at the nearness of the sea took precedence over every other emotion as she stood on the piazza after the embraces were over.

"How adorably stunning! I must go out sailing the first thing," were her words.

Meanwhile the aunts were observing that she appeared the picture of health and was tall and athletic-looking. In one hand she had carried a tennis-racket in its case, in the other, a bag of golf clubs, as she alighted from the vehicle. These evidently were her household gods. The domestic vision which they had entertained might need rectification.

"You sail, of course?" Mabel asked, noticing, doubtless, that her exclamation was received in silence.

Aunt Rebecca shook her head. "I haven't been in a sail-boat for twenty years."

"But whose steam yacht is that?"

"It belongs to Mr. Anderson, a wealthy neighbor."

"Anyhow, a knockabout is more fun--a twenty-footer," the girl continued, her gaze still fixed on the haven which the indentations of the coast afforded, along which at intervals groups of yachts, large and small, floated at their moorings picturesque as sea-gulls on a feeding-ground.

"There is an old rowboat in the barn. I daresay that Thomas, the coachman, will take you out rowing sometimes after he has finished his work," said Aunt Carry kindly.

"Do you swim?" inquired Aunt Rebecca, failing to note her niece's bewildered expression.

"Like a duck. I'm quite as much at home on the water as on land. I've had a sailboat since I was thirteen, and most of our summers have been spent at Buzzard's Bay."

"But you're a young lady now," said Aunt Rebecca.

Mabel looked from one to the other as though she were speculating as to what these new protectors were like. "Am I?" she asked with a smile. "I must remember that, I suppose; but it will be hard to change all at once." Thereupon she stepped lightly to the edge of the cliff that she might enjoy more completely the view while she left them to digest this qualified surrender.

"No pent-up Utica contracts her powers," murmured Miss Rebecca, who was fond of classic verse.

"It is evident that we shall have our hands full," answered Miss Carry. "But she's fresh as a rose, and wide-awake. I'm sure the dear girl will try to please us."

Mabel did try, and succeeded; but it was a success obtained at the cost of setting at naught all her aunts' preconceived ideas regarding the correct deportment of marriageable girls. The knockabout was forthcoming shortly after she had demonstrated her amphibious qualities by diving from the rocks and performing water feats which dazed her anxious guardians. Indeed, she fairly lived in her bathing-dress until the novelty wore off. Thomas, the coachman, who had been a fisherman in his day, announced with a grin, after accompanying her on the trial trip of the hired cat-boat, that he could teach her nothing about sailing. Henceforth her small craft was almost daily a distant speck on the horizon, and braved the seas so successfully under her guidance that presently the aunts forbore to watch for disaster through a spyglass.

She could play tennis, too, with the best, as she demonstrated on the courts of The Beaches Club. Her proficiency and spirit speedily made

friends for her among the young people of the colony, who visited her and invited her to take part in their amusements. She was prepared to ride on her bicycle wherever the interest of the moment called her, and deplored the solemnity of the family carryall. When her aunts declared that a wheel was too undignified a vehicle on which to go out to luncheon, she compromised on a pony cart as a substitute, for she could drive almost as well as she could sail. She took comparatively little interest in the garden, and was not always at home at five-o'clock tea to read aloud the latest books; but her amiability and natural gaiety were like sunshine in the house. She talked freely of what she did, and she had an excellent appetite.

"She's as unlike the girls of my day as one could imagine, and I do wish she wouldn't drive about the country bareheaded, looking like a colt or a young Indian," said Miss Rebecca pensively one morning, just after Mabel's departure for the tennis-court. "But I must confess that she's the life of the place, and we couldn't get on without her now. I don't think, though, that she has done three hours of solid reading since she entered the house. I call that deplorable."

"She's a dear," said Aunt Carry. "We haven't been much in the way of seeing young girls of late, and Mabel doesn't seem to me different from most of those who visit her. Twenty years ago, you remember, girls pecked at their food and had to lie down most of the time. Now they eat it. What I can't get quite used to is the habit of letting young men call them by their first names on short acquaintance. In my time," she added with a little sigh, "it would have been regarded as inconsistent with maidenly reserve. I'm sure I heard the young man who was here last night say, 'I've known you a week now; may I call you Mabel?'"

As to young men, be it stated, the subject of this conversation showed herself impartially indifferent. Her attitude seemed to be that boys were good fellows as well as girls, and should be encouraged accordingly. If they chose to make embarrassing speeches regarding one's personal appearance and to try to be alone with one as much as possible, while such favoritism was rather a fillip to existence, it was to be considered at bottom as an excellent joke. Young men came and young men went. Mabel attracted her due share. Yet evidently she seemed to be as glad to see the last comer as any of his predecessors.

Then occurred the second happening in the tranquil existence of the maiden ladies. One day at the end of the first summer, an easterly day, when the sky was beginning to be obscured by scud and the sea was swelling with the approach of a storm, Dan Anderson, the only son of his father, was knocked overboard by the boom while showing the heels of his thirty-foot knockabout to the hired boat of his neighbor, Miss Mabel Ripley. They were not racing, for his craft was unusually fast, as became a multi-millionaire's plaything. Besides, he and the girl

had merely a bowing acquaintance. The _Firefly_ was simply bobbing along on the same tack as the _Enchantress_, while the fair skipper, who had another girl as a companion, tried vainly, at a respectful distance, to hold her own by skill.

The headway on Dan's yacht was so great that before the two dazed salts on board realized what had happened their master was far astern. They bustled to bring the _Enchantress_ about and to come to his rescue in the dingy. Stunned by the blow of the--spar, he had gone down like a stone; so, in all probability, they would have been too late. When he came up the second time it was on the port bow of the _Firefly_, but completely out of reach. Giving the tiller to her friend, and stripping off superfluous apparel, Mabel jumped overboard in time to grasp and hold the drowning youth. There she kept him until aid reached them. But the unconscious victim did not open his eyes until after he had been laid on the Misses Ripley's lawn, where, by virtue of brandy from the medicine-closet and hot-water bottles, the flickering spark of life was coaxed into a flame.

It was an agitating experience for the aunts. But Mabel was none the worse for the wetting; and though she naturally made light of her performance, congratulations on her pluck and presence of mind came pouring in. David Walker suggested that the Humane Society would be sure to take the matter up and confer a medal upon the heroine. The members of the Anderson family came severally to express with emotion their gratitude and admiration. The father had not been there since his previous eventful visit, though once or twice he had met his neighbors on the road and stopped to speak to them, as if to show he harbored no malice in spite of his disappointment.

Now with a tremulous voice he bore testimony to the greatness of the mercy which had been vouchsafed him.

The third and last happening might be regarded as a logical sequel to the second by those who believe that marriages are made in heaven. It was to ponder it again after having pondered it for twenty-four hours that the Ripley sisters found themselves in their pleached garden at the close of the day. That the event was not unforeseen by one of them was borne out by the words of Miss Carry:

"I remember saying to myself that day on the lawn, Rebecca, that it would be just like the modern girl if she were to marry him; because she saved his life, I mean. If he had saved hers, as used to happen, she would never have looked at him twice. I didn't mention it because it was only an idea, which might have worried you."

"We have seen it coming, of course," answered Miss Rebecca, who was clasping the points of her elbows. "And there was nothing to do about it--even if we desired to. I can't help, though, feeling sorry that

she isn't going to marry some one we know all about--the family, I mean.

"Well," she added with a sigh, "the Andersons will get our place in the end, after all, and we shall be obliged to associate more or less with multi-millionaires for the rest of our days. It's depressing ethically; but there's no use in quarrelling with one's own flesh and blood, if it is a modern girl, for one would be quarrelling most of the time. We must make the best of it, Carry, and--and try to like it."

"He really seems very nice," murmured Miss Carry. "He gives her some new jewel almost every day."

Miss Rebecca sniffed disdainfully, as though to inquire if love was to be attested by eighteen-carat gold rather than by summer blooms.

The sound of steps on the gravel path interrupted their confabulation.

"It is Mr. Anderson, _père_" said Miss Carry laconically.

"He is coming to take possession," responded her sister.

The crunch of the gravel under his solid, firm tread jarred on their already wearied sensibilities. Nevertheless they knew that it behooved them to be cordial and to accept the situation with good grace. Their niece was over head and ears in love with a young man whose personal character, so far as they knew, was not open to reproach, and who would be heir to millions. What more was to be said? Indeed, Miss Rebecca was the first to broach the subject after the greetings were over.

"Our young people seem to have made up their minds that they cannot live apart," she said.

"So my son has informed me."

Mr. Anderson spoke gravely and then paused. His habitually confident manner betrayed signs of nervousness.

"I told him this morning that there could be no engagement until after I had talked with you," he added.

One could have heard a pin drop. Each of the sisters was tremulous to know what was coming next. Could he possibly be meditating purse-proud opposition? The Ripley blue blood simmered at the thought, and Miss Rebecca, nervous in her turn, tapped the ground lightly with her foot.

"The day I was first here," he resumed, "you ladies taught me a

lesson. I believed then that money could command anything. I discovered that I was mistaken. It provoked me, but it set me thinking. I've learned since that the almighty dollar cannot buy gentle birth and--and the standards which go with it."

Unexpectedly edifying as this admission was, his listeners sought in vain to connect it with the immediate issue, and consequently forebore to speak.

"The only return I can make for opening my eyes to the real truth is by doing what I guess you would do if you or one of your folk were in my shoes. I'm a very rich man, as you know. If your niece marries my son her children will never come to want in their time. He's a good boy, if I do say it; and I should be mighty proud of her."

Miss Carry breathed a gentle sigh of relief at this last avowal.

"I don't want her to marry him, though, without knowing the truth, and perhaps when you hear it you'll decide that she must give him up."

Thereupon Mr. Anderson blew his nose by way of gathering his faculties for the crucial words as a carter rests his horse before mounting the final hill when the sledding is hard.

"I'm going to tell you how I made my first start. I was a clerk in a bank and sharp as a needle in forecasting what was going to happen downtown. I used to say to myself that if I had capital it would be easy to make money breed money. Well, one day I borrowed from the bank, without the bank's leave, \$3,000 in order to speculate. I won on that deal and the next and the next. Then I was able to return what I'd borrowed and to set up in a small way for myself in the furniture business. That was my start, ladies--the nest-egg of all I've got."

He sat back in his chair and passed his handkerchief across his forehead like one who has performed with credit an agonizing duty.

There was silence for a moment. Unequivocal as the confession was, Miss Rebecca, reluctant to believe her ears, asked with characteristic bluntness:

"You mean that you--er--misappropriated the money?"

"I was an embezzler, strictly speaking."

"I see."

"Perhaps you wonder why I told you this," he said, bending forward.

"No, we understand," said Miss Rebecca.

"We understand perfectly," exclaimed Miss Carry with gentle warmth.

"It's very honest of you, Mr. Anderson," said Miss Rebecca after a musing pause.

"I've never been dishonest since then," he remarked naïvely. "But a year ago I wouldn't have told you this, though it's been in the back of my mind as a rankling sore, growing as I grew in wealth and respectability. I made a bluff at believing that it didn't matter, and that a thing done has an end. Well, now I've made a clean breast of it to the ones who have a right to know. I should like you to tell Mabel."

As he spoke the lovers appeared in the near distance at the edge of the lawn, coming up from the beach. "But I don't think it will be necessary to tell my son," he added yearningly.

"Certainly _not_" said Miss Rebecca with emphasis.

The sisters exchanged glances, trying to read each other's thoughts.

"It's a blot in the 'scutcheon, of course," said Miss Rebecca. "It's for our niece to say." But there was no sternness in her tone.

This gave Miss Carry courage. Her hand shook a little as she put down her teacup, for she was shy of taking the initiative. "I think I know what she would say. In our time it would probably have been different, on account of the family--and heredity; but Mabel is a modern girl. And a modern girl would say that she isn't to marry the father but the son. She loves him, so I'm certain she would never give him up. Therefore is it best to tell her?"

Daniel Anderson's face was illumined with the light of hope, and he turned to the elder sister, whom he recognized as the final judge.

Miss Rebecca sniffed. Her ideas of everlasting justice were a little disconcerted. Nevertheless she said firmly after brief hesitation:

"I was taught to believe that the sins of the fathers should be visited on the children; but I believe, Carry, you're right."

"Bless you for that," exclaimed the furniture king. Then, groping in the excess of his emotion for some fit expression of gratitude, he bent forward and, taking Miss Rebecca's hand, pressed his lips upon her fingers as an act of homage.

Miss Carry would have been justified in reflecting that it would have been more fitting had he kissed her fingers instead. But she was used

to taking the second place in the household, and the happy expression of her countenance suggested that her thoughts were otherwise engaged.

AÏDA AND SAADI

from: Project Gutenberg's *The Great Small Cat and Others*, by May E. Southworth

The contented purr of "Home Sweet Home" on the hearth, by a resident kitten, was the one touch of coziness lacking in our newly acquired country bungalow.

Seeing an exhibition of thoroughbreds advertised, with many for sale, a trip was made for the sole purpose of filling this pleasant need in our comfortable chimney corner, and so making our little ménage complete. On arriving at the crowded display rooms, where each cat's family ancestors were found carefully recorded, the problem of selecting the correct kitten, among so bewildering a collection of purple pedigrees, was a rather serious one. They all looked so fuzzy, chubby and attractive that we wanted them all, and it was impossible to decide on just one. After long and careful consideration, two babies were finally selected for their special beauty and daintiness, as the ones most likely to blend harmoniously with the crackle of our cheerful fire, and the singing of the evening tea urn in our bungalow.

The homeward journey, with the tiny princesses carried carefully and almost awesomely, was one of suppressed, but anticipated triumph, in being the fortunate possessors of something worth while in cats and something that would doubtless become real blessings under the careful training and wise discipline we were already planning.

On reaching home and joyously throwing back the cover of the padded traveling basket, we found the expected excitement painfully lacking; there was no eager bounding of the released little captives as would be most natural in ordinary kittens, and which we had expected twofold in these extraordinary ones, not even a friendly mew--just an awkward silence, with two of the most pathetic, tired looking bunches of royalty staring up from the basket, with frightened eyes.

We gently lifted the scared, chrysanthemum-like blossoms of fur from the basket and silently but proudly placed them on the floor in order to display their blue-blooded points, that all might be properly awed. But even then, in spite of their beauty, which all acknowledged, they failed to make any sort of pleasant impression, but lay just as they had been placed, crouching almost flat in shrinking terror of their new surroundings. As they cowered there in cringing, pathetic helplessness, they looked like almost anything but kittens to be proud of, and the audience smiled incredulously, while I as their sponsor in momentary chagrin and contrition, wondered if, perhaps, in pride, I had not been too ambitious in making a selection of such royal daintiness. For,

might it not be that the solemnity of such a long line of lineage would result in their being a terrible disappointment as mere kittens, and what we had planned on having was nice, fat, cheery, comfy playfellows. The poor small mites of big pedigree were certainly woefully depressing under the present strain, and at this rather inopportune moment it was cheerfully suggested that I might possibly have done better in my investment, and perhaps realized a greater profit, with the homemade "just cat" variety. But I ignored these sarcastic insinuations and would not be disheartened, for my treasures were of the renowned Persian species and I was still hopeful that the purity of the blood which circulated in their veins would yet prove its worth. Even to the skeptical, they showed that they were unmistakably the real article by an elegance of finish throughout, and that they were of the purest breeding, for their coats were unusually long, with soft, full, fluffy scruffs and little tufts of hair growing out of their thin pink ears and between their darling chubby toes.

At first it did seem as if, with their advent, a rather serious and unnecessary responsibility had been thrust upon an inexperienced household, for the risk in rearing these tender thoroughbreds was perhaps too great to assume without the aid of a natural parent. Fortunately for us, the melancholy period of their abrupt and rather shocking orphanage soon passed, and under our loving care the memory of mother gradually faded away. They grew and thrived like plain ordinary kittens and soon began to frolic and take on the gladness of life, in spite of the deprivation of a real mother's cuddling and nursing.

As our acquaintance grew into one of weeks, we discovered that there would be no lack of entertainment, for the royal babies took life in doses of "doing things" most of the time. Surely no one could accuse them of being bereft of temperament, as we had feared, for they possessed an intense and heartbreaking inclination for excitement in various varieties all the time, quite enough to reassure even the most doubting that we were in no danger of not getting our money's worth in lively kittens. In fact the innocent infants' progress along the lines of cute and daring adventure caused daily and almost hourly shocks, as they seemed uncanny in resourcefulness and absolutely fearless in devising all sorts of startling surprises in the way of miscellaneous mischief, counting that day as naught and unprofitable which brought forth nothing new in the way of satanic curiosity and inspiration for getting into trouble.

The whole household fell under the spell of their charm and were their faithful adorers, the kittens being the deities before which were offered up daily homage, and all lent a helping hand in their "spoiling" as well as in their education. In no time, it seemed, they became quite accomplished in the understanding of certain words taught them in painful seriousness and were soon trained to ask for many little services with such charming and almost human ways as to

have conquered the most obdurate heart, had there been any. They were wondrous wise and certainly marvellously clever for kittens, and we could not help being very proud and a little boastful of their achievements along kitten lines, as well as of their strikingly elegant appearance. There was nothing commonplace about them. Even their wild and hilarious playfulness was high tragedy, having such concentration of energy in it that, as they grew older, it developed into a big bump of bad, bold destructiveness. Also, time proved that they possessed a decidedly feminine and insatiable love of investigation and a tragic thirst for information, especially in natural history.

This swelling protuberance of inquisitiveness as regards the earth and its various productions of feathered creatures was taking them nearly every day on long excursions into the near-by woods, often keeping them absent for hours at a time causing us growing anxiety as to their safety. As this trip to the woods became an almost daily after-breakfast custom my curiosity was roused to such an extent that I determined that I, too, would stroll forth the next morning to contemplate nature, and if possible, incidentally discover the fascination that was keeping the infants so much from home. The suggestion that they might be even looking at the little birds with evil intent, made me indignant; it was unbelievable those ingenuous eyes could be so guileful, yet somehow I shivered with a vague premonition. Resentfully I argued that they were too young for such cruelty; moreover they were of such royal blood, princesses of their kind, that one could hardly imagine their doing anything so scandalously plebeian.

However, the next morning, with secret and rather ominous forebodings, I sauntered away in the bright May sunshine, through our old-fashioned garden and up toward the woods, two small downy puffs bounding along by my side as lightly as if blown by the wind, their round little eyes like shining suns in their tiny fluffy heads. They scampered aimlessly, far and near, their heels a-tingle with mischief, poking their noses into all sorts of out-of-the-way places and having a lot of terrifying experiences, getting frightened at everything that could possibly be made into anything scary. They were so seriously determined on investigating all alluring possibilities that not a moving thing escaped their vigilance, from the bees in the bushes to an aeroplane that flew overhead; nor would they have failed, if possible, to help it along with their paws or turn it over and make it go the other way. Occasionally they would stop and scent a flower or perhaps glance warily about, Indian fashion, pretending to see nothing, but raising their eyes with a sweet pretence of innocence to the trees, especially, I noticed, if there happened to be a twitter among the branches. In fact, they appeared to think there was something truly wonderful about those trees--the plain ordinary green ones with the usual number of fine feathery limbs in which the birds love to rest their wings. Further than that, however, their conduct was absolutely blameless, and

as we all scurried home I was comfortably convinced that the matutinal walks of these dainty elegances were simply due to an overpowering longing for the green things of earth and the fresh air, possibly from the tree branches, but just the love of being out of doors, with a special desire to enjoy the wonderland beauties of our own woody range, in which we ourselves took great pride.

While still in their tenderest baby days, the kittens developed such an ardent talent for clinging together in all their activities that they seemed like two branches swayed by the same breezes. It was more than the usual natural bond of kinship, even between twins; more like something prenatal, as if one thought instigated all their doings. They ate together, walked together, snoozed together, and were never separated; to see one was always to see both, and everything that happened took place in pairs. They breathed one common atmosphere of trust and faith in each other. Their little feminine hearts may have been often false to us, but to one another they were always faithfully loyal, enduring with unswerving devotion in this oneness everything good or bad that was theirs to share. In living mischief and in the joy of their great discoveries, they were always as of one mind. Ever frolicking together in the sunshine of happy days and generously sharing the sorrows of this vale of tears on hard ones. As one galvanized body, they went through kittenhood in good and bad ways, suffering and enjoying in the everlasting bond of an alliance offensive and defensive.

Their good qualities were so many, and their allegiance to the entire household apparently so faithful, that it came as a sickening disappointment when a little murdered bird, the result of their prowess, was brought and laid at my feet. After this there was no further mystery or doubt as to their inward viciousness, and that it was pure murder-lust just for the delight in the killing was shown by their never once offering to eat their victims. Sometimes they would bring them home and simply "lay them away," and sometimes leave them, all bloody, under the trees. Feeling that I was the one most responsible for the morals of these little heathens, and the one most blamed for their wickedness, an ardent missionary fever began to burn in my indignant blood, and I secretly determined that there should be one hand, strong enough in love, to at least discipline this scandalous feature in their otherwise gentle breeding. If our little aristocratic babies could not live in friendship with our feathered beauties of the woods, they should be forced by some kind of vigorous training to leave them in peace; for we loved the little birds, and their sweet songs in our woods, too much to be reconciled to any such disloyal warfare upon them.

It was with a sinking sensation that I sadly and quietly followed the marauders one morning as they stole off for their usual "after-breakfast" diversion of seeing things in the woods. I was firmly

resolved to find out how and where the fledglings were captured and cut off so untimely in their innocent careers and took good care that the kittens did not see me or know that I was waiting grimly in hiding until I could catch them red-handed, and there could be no mistake.

At last my time came, when the degenerates were both crouched near a tree, with wide open, flaming eyes cruelly set on a little chirping songster. Then as they crept forward with eager desire and all the cunning stealth of plain, common, feline ancestry, and were just ready to spring on their unconscious game, I burst upon them in such a frenzy that it frightened them into a state of absolute dismay. But before they could feint, the pair of abject and convicted criminals were hustled back to the house in terrible disgrace, and, hardening my heart, such discipline and argument was administered as was deemed expedient.

Naturally better things had been expected from such beautiful, saint-like looking cherubs, who did not have to make a living by their wits, and this depraved, red-flame blood lust in their being was a double surprise and disappointment.

Under surveillance, these injured innocents became very artful and sly and would resort to all sorts of deception in order to avert suspicion. If caught loitering about their favorite hunting ground, the hypocrites would dally about in gaping pink yawns of boredom, in the most indifferent manner, or play Jack and the Bean-stalk by darting madly up the trunk of a tree and chasing their own tails down, just to show that joyous exercise was the chief, and in fact the only reason for their fondness for the woods. There was no doubt but that they understood perfectly their transgression, and if they were discovered in the delirium of the hunt, we faithfully did our dark and dreadful duty. But they took their discipline so meekly that it was simply heartbreaking to see their tiny, shrinking little bodies after such rudeness, hiding in out-of-the-way places, with terrible fear in their big scared eyes, that were wont to look up at us in such love and expectancy. The touching resignation of these tiny criminals under our correction made us feel almost ashamed of our power, especially as they seemed so superior to it. Moreover it did not seem to make any lasting impression, nothing resulting from such painful experience to both, in the way of reform, that could be detected by the naked eye. But, as we explained to them over and over again, if we had only been able to correct this one little evil in their hearts and make them half as penitent and guileless as their beautiful, remorseful eyes looked, our pains would have been rewarded by their becoming the very best of citizens.

Bearing so calmly and patiently our severity, as if suffering an injustice, they fortunately, bore no malice in their baby hearts and neither punishment nor disgrace could suppress for long their

indomitable spirits. Although they acted for the time being as if their hearts were broken, smashed beyond repair, as soon as it was deemed advisable for consolation to be administered, they were coaxed back to life and soon were as fearlessly and beautifully happy as ever, trifles of this kind passing as a little summer cloud in their otherwise blue sky. From their humble resignation they evidently took this peculiar morality on the part of big mortals as being just one of the mysteries included in their cup of experiences in this queer world they were trying to fathom, but in which they had expected only sunshine.

There were times when they escaped vigilance and, in spite of the retribution which we surely had impressed upon them would follow as inevitably as a shadow, they would abandon themselves recklessly to their one dissipation and we were helpless before their defiance.

These disgraceful pets of ours were known to come back from such gory adventure, unshamedly, with the blood of their victims still wet on their lips, telling the horrible tale without apology. After such a stirring incident they usually seated themselves very close together on the porch steps, singularly calm, their two hearts beating as one, their little pink noses at the same angle high in the air, in that habitual attitude of "united we stand or united we fall" which was always and ever their bond of fellowship, and simply await unflinchingly for developments. If an accusing finger was raised at these demure hypocrites, their meek expressions were simply angelic, as if they were just waiting for halos. Under threatening and closer scrutiny, they would sanctimoniously lift their round, reproachful eyes and insolently lick their impudent chops as if scornfully saying:

"Oh, lady, you surely do not suspect us of having seen your birds this morning?"

Their innocent and demure air was positively exasperating and we were in despair over the prowling slaughter which made our hearts ache. In the stress of many other affairs, however, we feared that we would be obliged to give up our strenuous watchfulness and let these murderous little beasts pursue their deadly war on the feathered tribe as they willed, when one joyful day we discovered in the column of "What others have found out," a permanent remedy.

A quiet resolve was taken and another trip to town, and now these dainty little aristocrats go about in quest of experience with gleaming collars about their throats, upon which dangle little tinkling bells, so that they never escape the music which gives warning of their approach. From their look of appeal and almost of terror when these warnings sounded the first alarm, I imagine that it has lessened their confidence in the kindness of mankind and taken a great deal of joy out of the world for them.

[Illustration: AÏDA AND SAADI

"Oh, Lady! You do Not Suspect Us of Having Seen Any of Your Birds This Morning?"]

Ordinarily they submit to the fatalism, looking bored to death, but there are occasional lapses when their fighting blood struggles and they are excited almost to madness by the everlasting jingling. Then, again they will sometimes lift their appealing eyes in hopeless despair to our unyielding authority, opening their mouths as if to make a feeble protest in tremolo, but in their guilty helplessness, failing to utter a sound. But as no miracle of love happens in the way of release, they have become of necessity philosophers, and though doubtless they would give the world to be rid of these tink-tingles of law and order that follow every movement, they are martyrs and have learned, even in their brief experience of life, to make the best of the inevitable. The longer their residence in this world, the greater their education will be concerning the mystery of a higher power which arranges things so as to baffle a helpless kitten's best laid pleasant plans, even kittens with marvellous bushy tails with a double kink in them.

Nothing so completely subdued these incorrigibles and hurt their pride, as a horrible catastrophe they once inadvertently brought upon themselves, which came near being a tragedy. It was the first time in their play paradise that they ever met with absolute rebuff and it completely subdued them for the time being. One hot summer day, on coming in from one of their tramps abroad, very warm and very thirsty, they caught sight, both at the same instant, of a basin of gleaming, tempting, creamy white paint, which a careless workman had left standing there for a moment. Mistaking it for milk which doubtless our thoughtful kindness had prepared for their thirsty coming, they uttered a little flute-like duet of thanks and made a rush to their fate, side by side, as the animals went into the ark, not stopping for even a smell, so unsuspecting and great was their confidence. Down deep went their little aristocratic noses into the sticky mass, so deep they could hardly extract them!

We were very sorry for these foolish, self-confident little victims and they were very sorry for themselves. A strange, unwonted calm fell on our bungalow, and it was really one of the saddest times for all, humans as well as kittens. Until the paint wore off their faces and whiskers, it was an interval of quiet, in which there was no make-believe humility, but in which the culprits were really bowed to the earth in shame and with indigestion.

Truly, it is a hard world for even innocent little sinners!

MYRTLE

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by Emile Erckmann and Alexandre Chatrian

CHAPTER I.

Just at the end of the village of Dosenheim, in Alsace, about fifty yards from the gravelly road that leads into the wood, is a pretty cottage surrounded with an orchard, the flat roof loaded with boulder-stones, the gable-end looking down the valley.

Flights of pigeons wheel around it, hens are scratching and picking up what they can under the fences, the cock takes his stand majestically on the low garden wall, and sounds the *_réveillée_*, or the retreat, for the echoes of Falberg to repeat; an outside staircase, with its wooden banisters, the linen of the little household hanging over it, leads to the first story, and a vine climbs up the front, and spreads its leafy branches from side to side.

If you will only go up these steps you will see at the end of the narrow entry the kitchen, with its dresser and its pewter plates and dishes, its soup-tureens puffing out like balloons; open the door to the right and you are in the parlour with its dark oak furniture, a ceiling crossed by brown smoke-stained rafters, and its old Nuremberg clock click-clacking monotonously.

Here sits a woman of five-and-thirty, spinning and dreaming, her waist encircled with a long black taffety bodice, and her head covered with a velvet headdress, with long ribbons.

A man in broad-skirted velveteen coat, with breeches of the same, and with a fine open brow, looking calm and thoughtful, is dandling on his knee a fine stout boy, whistling the call to "boot and saddle."

There lies the quiet village at the end of the valley, framed, as you sit, in the little cottage window; the river is leaping over the mill-dam and crossing the winding street; the old houses, with their deep and gloomy eaves, their barns, their gabled windows, their nets drying in the sun; the young girls, kneeling by the river-side on the stones, washing linen; the cattle lazily lounging down to drink, and gravely lowing amidst the willows; the young herdsmen cracking their whips; the mountain summit, jagged like a saw by the pointed fir-tree tops--all these rural objects lie reflected in the flowing blue stream, only broken by the

fleets of ducks sailing down or the occasional passage of an old tree rooted up on the mountain-side.

Looking quietly on these things, you are impressed with a sense of the ease and comfort of which they speak, and you are moved with gratitude to the Giver of all good.

Well, my dear friends and neighbours, such was the cottage of the Brémers in 1820, such were Brémer himself, his wife Catherine, and their son, little Fritz.

To my own mind they come back exactly as I have described them to you.

Christian Brémer had served in the chasseurs of the Imperial Guard. After 1815 he had married Catherine, his old sweetheart, grown a little older, but quite fresh and fair, and full of grace. With his own little property, his house, and his four or five acres of vineyard, and Catherine's added to it, Brémer had become one of the most substantial bourgeois of Dosenheim; he might have been mayor, or adjoint, or municipal councillor, but these honours had no attractions for him; and what pleased him best was, after work was over, to take down his old gun, whistle for Friedland, and take him a turn in the woods.

Now it fell out one day that this worthy man, coming home after a day's shooting, brought in his bag a little gipsy girl two or three years old, as lively as a squirrel, and as brown as a hazel-nut. He had found her in the bundle of an unhappy gipsy woman who had died of fatigue or hunger, or both, at the foot of a tree.

You may well imagine what an outcry Catherine raised against this new uninvited member of her family. But as Brémer was master in his own house, he simply announced to his wife that the child should be christened by the name of Susanna Frederica Myrtle, and that she should be brought up with little Fritz.

As a matter of course, all the women in the place, old and young, came to pass their observations upon the little gipsy, whose serious and thoughtful expression of countenance surprised them.

"This is not a child like others," said they; "she is a heathen--quite a heathen! You may see by her eyes that she understands every word! She is listening now! Mind what I say, Maître Christian! Gipsies have claws at the ends of their fingers. If you will rear young ferrets and weasels you must not expect your poultry to be safe. They will have the run of all the farm-yard!"

"Go and mind your own business!" shouted Brémer. "I have seen Russians and Spaniards, I have seen Italians, and Germans, and Jews; some were brown, and some were black, some white, and others red; some had long

noses, and others had turned-down noses, but I found good fellows amongst them all."

"Very likely," said the ladies, "but those people lived in houses, and gipsies live in the open air."

He vouchsafed no reply to this argument, but with all possible politeness he put them out by the shoulders.

"Go away," he cried; "I don't want your advice. It is time to air the rooms, and then I have to go and attend to the stables."

But, after all, the rejected counsels were not so bad, as the event unhappily showed a dozen or fourteen years afterwards.

Fritz was always delighted to feed the cattle, and take the horses to the pond, and follow his father and learn to plough and sow, to reap and mow, to tie up the sheaves and bring them home. But Myrtle had no wish to milk the cows, churn the butter, shell peas, or peel potatoes.

When the maidens of Dosenheim, going out to wash clothes in the morning at the river, called her the heathen, she mirrored herself complacently in the fountain, and when she had admired her own long dark tresses, her violet lips, her white teeth, her necklace of red berries, she would smile and murmur to herself--

"Ah! they only call me a heathen because I am prettier than they are," and she would dip the tip of her little foot in the fountain and laugh.

But Catherine could not approve of such conduct, and said--

"Myrtle is not the least good to us. She won't do a single thing that is useful. It is no use for me to preach, and advise, and scold, she does everything the wrong way. The other day, when we were stowing away apples in the closet, she took bites out of the best to see if they were ripe! She has no pleasure but in gobbling up the best of everything."

Brémer himself could not help admitting that there was a very heathenish spirit in her when he heard his wife crying from morning till night, "Myrtle, Myrtle! where are you now? Ah, naughty, bad girl! she has run away into the woods again to gather blackberries." But still he laughed to himself, and pitied poor Catherine, whom he compared to a hen with a brood of ducklings.

Every year after harvest-time Fritz and Myrtle spent whole days far away from the farm, pasturing the cattle, singing, and whistling, and baking potatoes under the ashes, and coming down the rocky hill in the evening blowing the shepherd's horn.

These were some of Myrtle's happiest days. Seated before the burning hemp-stalks, with her pretty brown face between her hands, she lost herself in endless reveries.

The long strings of wild ducks and geese which traverse, about the end of autumn, the boundless heavens spread from the mountains on the east to the western hills, seemed to have a depressing effect upon her mind. She used to follow them with longing eyes, straining them as if to overtake the wild birds in the immeasurable distance; and suddenly she would rise, spread out her arms, and cry--

"I must go! I must go! I can't stay!"

Then she would weep with her head bowed down, and Fritz, seeing her in tears, would cry too, asking--

"Why do you cry, Myrtle? Has anybody hurt you? Is it any of the boys in the village?--Kasper, Wilhelm, Heinrich? Only tell me, and I will knock him down at once! Do tell!"

"No; it is not that."

"Well, why are you crying?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want to run as far as the Falberg?"

"No; that is not far enough."

"Where do you want to go?"

"Down there! down there! ever so far! where the birds are going."

This made Fritz open his eyes and his mouth very wide.

One day in September, when they were idling along by the woods, about noon, the heat was so great and the air so still that the smoke of their little fire, instead of rising straight into the air, fell like water and crept among the briars. The grasshopper had ceased its dull monotonous chirp, not the buzzing of a fly was to be heard, nor the warbling of a bird. The oxen and the cows, with sleepy eyes half-closed, their knees bent under them, were resting together under a spreading oak in the meadow, now and then lowing in a slow, protracted way as if in idle protest against such hot weather.

Fritz had begun by plaiting the strands of his whip, but he soon lay down in the long grass with his hat over his eyes, and Friedland came to lie near him, gaping from ear to ear.

Myrtle alone suffered no inconvenience from the overwhelming heat; sitting on the ground near the fire, with her arms wreathed around her knees, full in the sun, her large dark eyes slowly surveyed the dark arches formed by the branches of the forest.

Time passed on slowly. The distant village clock had struck twelve, then one, and two, and the young gipsy never stirred. In the woods and jagged mountain-tops, the crags, the forests, descending into the valleys, she heard some mysterious call. They spoke to her in a language not unknown to her.

"Yes," she said to herself, "yes; I have seen all that before--long ago--a long time ago."

Then with a quick, sharp glance at Fritz, who was in a deep sleep, she rose to her feet and began to fly. Her light footsteps scarcely bent the grass beneath her; she ran on and on, up the hill; Friedland turned his head round with a careless glance, then stretched out once more his languid limbs, and composed himself to sleep.

Myrtle disappeared in the midst of the brambles which border the common wood. At one bound she cleared the muddy ditch where a single frog was croaking amongst the rushes, and twenty minutes after she reached the top of the Roche Creuse, whence you may have a wide prospect of Alsace and the blue summits of the Vosges.

Then she turned to see if anybody was following her. She could still distinguish Fritz asleep in the green meadow with his hat over his eyes, and Friedland and the sleeping cattle under their tree.

Farther on she could see the village, the river, the roof of the farm-house, with its flights of pigeons eddying round; the long, crooked street and red-petticoated women walking leisurely up and down; the little ivy-covered church where the good _curé_ Niclausse had baptised her into the Christian faith and afterwards confirmed her.

And when she had sufficiently contemplated these objects, turning her face the other way towards the mountain, she was filled with delight to mark how the densely-crowded firs covered the hill-sides, up to their highest ridge, close as the grass of the fields.

At the sight of all this grandeur the young gipsy felt her heart beating and expanding with unknown delight, and again running on she darted through a rift between the rocks, lined with mosses and ferns, to reach the beaten track through the woods.

Her whole soul--that wild, untrained soul of hers--was rushing with her and impelling her onwards, kindling her countenance with a new ardour.

With her hands she clung to the ivy, with her naked feet she clung to the projections and the crevices to push on her way.

Soon she was on the other slope, running, tripping, leaping, sometimes stopping short to gaze upon surrounding objects--a large tree, a ravine, a lonely sheet of water, or a pond full of flowers and sweet-smelling water-plants.

Although she could not remember ever having seen those copses, those clearings, those heaths, at every turn in the path she would say to herself, "There, I knew it was so! I knew that tree would be there! I was sure of that rock! And there's the waterfall just below!" Although a thousand strange remembrances passed with momentary flashes, like sudden visions, through her mind, she could not understand it all and could explain nothing. She had not yet been able to say to herself, "What Fritz and the rest of them want to make them happy is the village, and the meadow, and the farm-house, and the fruit-trees, and the orchard, and the milk-cows, and the laying hens; plenty in the cellar, plenty in the granary, and a nice warm fire on the hearth in winter. But what have I to do with all these things? Wasn't I born a heathen, quite a heathen? I was born in the woods, just as the squirrel was born in an oak, just as a hawk was hatched on the crag and the thrush in the fir-tree!"

It is true she had never thought of these things, but she was guided by instinct; and this mysterious force drew her unconsciously about sunset to the bare heaths of the Kohle Platz, where the gangs of gipsies that wander between Alsace and Lorraine are accustomed to stay the night, and hang up their kettles among the dry heath.

Here Myrtle sat down at the foot of an old oak-tree, tired, footsore, and ragged; and here she long sat motionless, gazing into vacant space, listening to the rustling of the wind amongst the tall fir-trees, happy, and feeling herself quite alone in the wide solitude.

Night came. The stars broke out by thousands in the purple depths of the autumn sky. The moon rose and silvered with soft light the white stems of the birch-trees, which hung in graceful groups along the mountain sides.

The young gipsy was beginning to yield to sleep when cries in the distance roused her into an impulse to fly.

Hark! She knows the voices! They are those of Brémer, Fritz, and all the people of the farm searching for her!

Then, without a moment's hesitation, Myrtle flew, light as a roe, farther into the forest, stopping only at long intervals to listen attentively and anxiously.

The cries died away in the distance, and soon the only sound she could

hear was the loud beating of her own heart, and she went on her way at a less rapid pace.

Very late, when the moon's rays became less brilliant, unable to stand out against her fatigue any longer, she sank down on the heath and fell fast asleep.

She was four leagues from Dosenheim, near the source of the Zinzel. Brémer was not likely to come so far to look for her.

CHAPTER II.

It was broad daylight when Myrtle awoke amidst the deep solitudes of the Schlossberg, beneath an old fir-tree overgrown with moss and lichen. A thrush was whistling overhead; another was answering in the distance far down the valley. The morning breeze was fanning the rustling foliage; but the air, already warm, was loaded with the sweet perfumes of the ground-ivy, the honeysuckle, the woodruff, and the sweetbriars.

The young gipsy opened her eyes with astonishment remembering, with surprise and delight, that the voice of Catherine would no more trouble her, calling, "Myrtle! Myrtle! where are you, you idle child?" she smiled, and listened to what gave her pleasure, the note of the thrush singing among the trees.

Near at hand a spring was bubbling out of a cleft; the girl had but to look round to see the living stream running, sparkling and clear, amidst the long grass. From the rock high overhead hung an arbutus loaded with its gorgeous freight of scarlet berries.

Though Myrtle was thirsty she felt too idle to move amongst all this beauty and all this harmony, and she dropped her pretty brown face, smiling and admiring the daylight through her long dark lashes.

"This is how I am always going to be," she said. "How can I help it? I am an idle girl. I was made so."

Dreaming in this lazy way, the picture rose up in her mind of the farm-yard with the proud cock strutting among his hens, and then she remembered the eggs, how they used to find them in the straw in some corner of the barn.

"If I had a couple of hard-boiled eggs," she thought, "just like those Fritz had yesterday in his bag, with a crust of bread and a little salt, I should like it very well. But what signifies? When you can't get eggs

you have blackberries and whinberries."

A scent of whinberries made her little nostrils dilate with expectation.

"There are some here," she said; "I can smell them."

She was right. The wood was full of them.

In another minute, not hearing the thrush, she raised herself on her elbow and noticed the bird picking at the arbutus-berries.

Then she went to the brook and took a little clear water in her hollow hand, and observed that there was plenty of watercress.

Then she remembered what she had never taken the trouble to think of before, some words of the _curé_, Niclausse about the birds of the air that God provided for, and the lilies of the field that were more beautiful than the glory of Solomon, and she remembered the lesson about not being anxious for food and clothing, and thought that that would just suit her, for she did not think of any of the teaching of the same great Teacher about industry, and frugality, and living honestly, and so she came to the satisfying conclusion that the true heathens were Catherine and all her people, who were so foolish and wicked as to plough, and sow, and reap, while she was the good Christian, because she was as idle as the day was long.

She was still dwelling on these satisfactory deductions when there was a sudden rustling among the dead leaves and a noise of footsteps.

She was going to run away when a gipsy lad of eighteen or twenty appeared before her--a tall, lithe, dark fellow with thick woolly hair, shining black eyes, and thick parted lips.

His eyes glittered as he cried--

"Almâni!"

"Almâni!" replied Myrtle, moved with much interest.

"Ha, ha!" cried the lad, "what gang do you go with?"

"I don't know--I am looking for it."

And without any concealment she told him how Brémer had found her and brought her up, and how she had escaped yesterday from his house.

The young gipsy grinned, and showed a long double row of white teeth.

"I am going to Hazlach," he cried. "To-morrow there's a _fête_ there; our

band will all be there--Pfiffer Karl, Melchior, Blue-Titmouse, Fritz the clarionet, Coucou-Peter, and Magpie. The women are going fortune-telling, and we play the music. If you like, you may go with me."

"I will," said Myrtle, looking down.

Then he kissed her, laid his bag upon her back, and grasping his stick in both his hands, he cried--

"Now you are my wife! You will carry the bag for me, and I will keep you. Forward!"

And now Myrtle, lazy as she had always been at the farm, started off with all possible willingness.

He followed her, singing, and tumbling over on his hands and feet to express his joy!

From that day Myrtle has never been heard of.

Fritz almost died of grief when he found that she did not return; but a few years later he found comfort in marrying Gredel Dich, the miller's daughter, a fine, stout, active girl, who made him an excellent wife; and Catherine, his mother, was quite pleased, for Gredel Dich was quite an heiress!

Only Brémer could not be comforted; he was as fond of Myrtle as if she had been his own child, and he drooped visibly from day to day.

One winter's day when he had got up, and was looking out of the window, he saw a ragged but pretty gipsy girl passing through the village covered with snow, and with a heavy bag upon her shoulders, and sat down again with a deep sigh.

"What is the matter, Brémer?" asked his wife.

There was no answer. She came close. His eyes were closing. There he lay dead.

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Cry from a Far Planet, by Tom Godwin

* * * * *

The problem of separating the friends from the enemies was a major one in the conquest of space as many a dead spacer could have testified. A tough job when you could see an alien and judge appearances; far tougher when they were only whispers on the wind.

* * * * *

A smile of friendship is a baring of the teeth. So is a snarl of menace. It can be fatal to mistake the latter for the former.

Harm an alien being only under circumstances of self-defense.

TRUST NO ALIEN BEING UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

--From _Exploration Ship's Handbook_.

He listened in the silence of the Exploration ship's control room. He heard nothing but that was what bothered him; an ominous quiet when there should have been a multitude of sounds from the nearby village for the viewscreen's audio-pickups to transmit. And it was more than six hours past the time when the native, Throon, should have come to sit with him outside the ship as they resumed the laborious attempt to learn each other's language.

The viewscreen was black in the light of the control room, even though it was high noon outside. The dull red sun was always invisible through the world's thick atmosphere and to human eyes full day was no more than a red-tinged darkness.

He switched on the ship's outside floodlights and the viewscreen came to bright white life, showing the empty glades reaching away between groves of purple alien trees. He noticed, absently, that the trees seemed to have changed a little in color since his arrival.

The village was hidden from view by the outer trees but there should have been some activity in the broad area visible to him. There was none, not even along the distant segment of what should have been a busy

road. The natives were up to something and he knew, from hard experience on other alien worlds, that it would be nothing good. It would be another misunderstanding of some kind and he didn't know enough of their incomprehensible language to ask them what it was--

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Suddenly, as it always came, he felt someone or something standing close behind him and peering over his shoulder. He dropped his hand to the blaster he had taken to wearing at all times and whirled.

Nothing was behind him. There never was. The control room was empty, with no hiding place for anything, and the door was closed, locked by the remote-control button beside him. There was nothing.

The sensation of being watched faded, as though the watcher had withdrawn to a greater distance. It was perhaps the hundredth time within six days that he had felt the sensation. And when he slept at night something came to nuzzle at his mind; faceless, formless, utterly alien. For the past three nights he had not let the blaster get beyond quick reach of his hand, even when in bed.

But whatever it was, it could not be on the ship. He had searched the ship twice, a methodical compartment-by-compartment search that had found nothing. It had to be the work of the natives from outside the ship. Except....

Why, if the natives were telepathic, did the one called Throon go through the weary pretense of trying to learn a mutually understandable form of communication?

There was one other explanation, which he could not accept: that he was following in the footsteps of Will Garret of Ship Nine who had deliberately gone into a white sun two months after the death of his twin brother.

He looked at the chair beside his own, Johnny's chair, which would forever be empty, and his thoughts went back down the old, bitter paths. The Exploration Board had been wrong when they thought the close bond between identical twins would make them the ideal two-man crews for the lonely, lifetime journeys of the Exploration Ships. Identical twins were too close; when one of them died, the other died in part with him.

They had crossed a thousand light-years of space together, he and Johnny, when they came to the bleak planet that he would name Johnny's World. He should never have let Johnny go alone up the slope of the honey-combed mountain--but Johnny had wanted to take the routine record photographs of the black, tiger-like beasts which they had called cave cats and the things had seemed harmless and shy, despite their ferocious

appearance.

"I'm taking them a sack of food that I think they might like," Johnny had said. "I want to try to get some good close-up shots of them."

Ten minutes later he heard the distant snarl of Johnny's blaster. He ran up the mountainside, knowing already that he was too late. He found two of the cave cats lying where Johnny had killed them. Then he found Johnny, at the foot of a high cliff. He was dead, his neck broken by the fall. Scattered all around him from the torn sack was the food he had wanted to give to the cats.

He buried Johnny the next day, while a cold wind moaned under a lead-gray sky. He built a monument for him; a little mound of frosty stones that only the wild animals would ever see--

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A chime rang, high and clear, and the memories were shattered. The orange light above the hyperspace communicator was flashing; the signal that meant the Exploration Board was calling him from Earth.

He flipped the switch and said, "Paul Jameson, Exploration Ship One."

The familiar voice of Brender spoke:

"It's been some time since your preliminary report. Is everything all right?"

"In a way," he answered. "I was going to give you the detailed report tomorrow."

"Give me a brief sketch of it now."

"Except for their short brown fur, the natives are humanoid in appearance. But there are basic differences. Their body temperature is cool, like their climate. Their vision range is from just within the visible red on into the infrared. They'll shade their eyes from the light of anything as hot as boiling water but they'll look square into the ship's floodlights and never see them."

"And their knowledge of science?" Brender asked.

"They have a good understanding of it, but along lines entirely different from what our own were at their stage of development. For example: they power their machines with chemicals but there is no steam, heat, or exhaust."

"That's what we want to find--worlds where branches of research unknown

to our science are being explored. How about their language?"

"No progress with it yet." He told Brender of the silence in the village and added, "Even if Throon should show up I could not ask him what was wrong. I've learned a few words but they have so many different definitions that I can't use them."

"I know," Brender said. "Variable and unrelated definitions, undetectable shades of inflection--and sometimes a language that has no discernibly separate words. The Singer brothers of Ship Eight ran into the latter. We've given them up as lost."

"The Singers--dead?" he exclaimed. "Good God--it's been only a month since the Ramon brothers were killed."

"The circumstances were similar," Brender said. "They always are. There is no way the Exploration men can tell the natives that they mean them no harm and the suspicion of the natives grows into dangerous hostility. The Singers reported the natives on that world to be both suspicious and possessing powerful weapons. The Singers were proceeding warily, their own weapons always at hand. But, somehow, the natives caught them off-guard--their last report was four months ago."

There was a silence, then Brender added, "Their ship was the ninth--and we had only fifteen."

He did not reply to the implications of Brender's statement. It was obvious to them all what the end of the Plan would be. What it had to be.

* * * * *

It had been only three years since the fifteen heavily armed Exploration ships set out to lead the way for Terran expansion across the galaxy; to answer a cry from far planets, and to find all the worlds that held intelligent life. That was the ultimate goal of the Plan: to accumulate and correlate all the diverse knowledge of all the intelligent life-forms in the galaxy. Among the achievements resulting from that tremendous mass of data would be a ship's drive faster even than hyperspace; the Third Level Drive which would bring all the galaxies of the universe within reach.

And now nine ships were gone out of fifteen and nineteen men out of thirty....

"The communication barrier," Brender said. "The damned communication barrier has been the cause behind the loss of every ship. And there is nothing we can do about it. We're stymied by it...."

The conversation was terminated shortly afterward and he moved about the room restlessly, wishing it was time to lift ship again. With Johnny not there the dark world was like a smothering tomb. He would like to leave it behind and drive again into the star clouds of the galaxy; drive on and on into them--

A ghostly echo touched his mind; restless, poignantly yearning. He swung to face the locked door, knowing there could be nothing behind it. The first real fear came to him as he did so. The thing was lonely--the thing that watched him was as lonely as he was....

What else could any of it be but the product of a mind in the first stage of insanity?

* * * *

The natives came ten minutes later.

The viewscreen showed their chemically-powered vehicle emerge from the trees and roll swiftly across the glade. Four natives were in it while a fifth one lay on the floor, apparently badly injured.

The vehicle stopped a short distance in front of the airlock and he recognized the native on the floor. It was Throon, the one with whom he had been exchanging language lessons.

They were waiting for him when he emerged from the ship, pistol-like weapons in their belts and grim accusation in their manner.

Throon was muttering unintelligibly, unconscious. His skin, where not covered by the brown fur, was abnormal in appearance. He was dying.

The leader of the four indicated Throon and said in a quick, brittle voice: "_Ko reegar feen no-dran!_"

Only one word was familiar: "_Ko_", which meant "you" and "yesterday" and a great many other things. The question was utterly meaningless to him.

He dropped his hand a little nearer his blaster as the leader spoke again; a quick succession of unknown words that ended with a harshly demanding "_kreson!_"

"_Kreson_" meant "now," or "very quickly." All the other words were unfamiliar to him. They waited, the grim menace about them increasing when he did not answer. He tried in vain to find some way of explaining to them he was not responsible for Throon's sickness and could not cure it.

Then he saw the spray of leaves that had caught on the corner of the

vehicle when it came through the farther trees.

They were of a deep purple color. All the trees around the ship were almost gray by contrast.

Which meant that he _was_ responsible for Throon's condition.

The cold white light of the ship's floodlights, under which he and Throon had sat for day after day, contained radiations that went through the violet and far into the ultraviolet. To the animal and vegetable life of the dark world such radiations were invisibly short and deadly.

Throon was dying of hard-radiation sickness.

It was something he should have foreseen and avoided--and that would not have happened had he accepted old Throon's pantomimed invitation, in the beginning, to go with him into the village to work at the language study. There he would have used a harmless battery lamp for illumination ... but there was no certainty that the natives were not planning to lay a trap for him in the village and he had refused to go.

It did not matter--there was a complex radiation-neutralizer and cell-reconstructor in the ship which would return Throon to full, normal health a few hours after he was placed in its chamber.

He turned to the leader of the four natives and motioned from Throon to the airlock. "Go--there," he said in the native language.

"_Bron!_" the leader answered. The word meant "No" and there was a determination in the way he said it that showed he would not move from it.

At the end of five minutes his attempts to persuade them to take Throon into the ship had increased their suspicion of his motives to the point of critical danger. If only he could tell them _why_ he wanted Throon taken into the ship ... But he could not and would have to take Throon by first disposing of the four without injuring them. This he could do by procuring one of the paralyzing needle-guns from the ship.

He took a step toward the ship and spoke the words that to the best of his knowledge meant: "I come back."

"_Feswin ilt k'la._"

Their reply was to snatch at their weapons in desperate haste, even as the leader uttered a hoarse word of command. He brought up the blaster with the quick motion that long training had perfected and their weapons were only half drawn when his warning came:

"_Bron!_"

* * * * *

They froze, but did not release their weapons. He walked backward to the airlock, his blaster covering them, the tensely waiting manner in which they watched his progress telling him that the slightest relaxation of his vigilance would mean his death. He did not let the muzzle of the blaster waver until he was inside the airlock and the outer door had slid shut.

He was sure that the natives would be gone when he returned. And he was sure of another thing: That whatever he had said to them, it was not what he had thought he was saying.

He saw that the glade was empty when he opened the airlock again. At the same time a bomb-like missile struck the ship just above the airlock and exploded with a savage crash. He jabbed the _Close_ button and the door clicked shut barely in advance of three more missiles which hammered at its impervious armor.

So that, he thought wearily, is that.

He laid the useless needle-gun aside. The stage was past when he could hope to use it. He could save Throon only by killing some of the others--or he could lift ship and leave Throon to die. Either action would make the natives hate and fear Terrans; a hatred and fear that would be there to greet all future Terran ships.

That was not the way a race gave birth to peaceful galactic empire, was not the purpose behind the Plan. But always, wherever the Exploration men went, they encountered the deadly barrier; the intangible, unassailable communication barrier. With the weapons an Exploration man carried in his ship he had the power to destroy a world--but not the power to ask the simple questions that would prevent fatal misunderstandings.

And before another three years had passed the last Exploration man would die, the last Exploration ship would be lost.

He felt the full force of hopelessness for the first time. When Johnny had been alive it had been different; Johnny, who had laughed whenever the outlook was the darkest and said, "_We'll find a way, Paul--_"

The thought broke as suddenly, unexpectedly, he felt that Johnny was very near. With the feeling came the soft enclosure of a dream-like peace in which Johnny's death was vague and faraway; only something that had happened in another dream. He knew, without wondering why, that Johnny was in the control room.

A part of his mind tried to reject the thought as an illusion. He did not listen--he did not want to listen. He ran to the ship's elevator, stumbling like one not fully awake. Johnny was waiting for him in the control room--alive--alive--

* * * * *

He spoke as he stepped into the control room:

"Johnny--"

Something moved at the control board, black and alien, standing tall as a man on short hind legs. Yellow eyes blazed in a feline face.

It was a cave cat, like the ones that had killed Johnny.

Realization was a wrenching shock and a terrible disillusionment. Johnny was not waiting for him--not alive--

He brought up the blaster, the dream-like state gone. The paw of the cave cat flashed out and struck the ship's master light switch with a movement faster than his own. The room was instantly, totally, dark.

He fired and pale blue fire lanced across the room, to reveal that the cave cat was gone. He fired again, quickly and immediately in front of him. The pale beam revealed only the ripped metal floor.

"_I am not where you think._"

The words spoke clearly in his mind but there was no directional source. He held his breath, listening for the whisper of padded feet as the cave cat flashed in for the kill, and made a swift analysis of the situation.

The cave cat was telepathic and highly intelligent and had been on the ship all the time. It and the others had wanted the ship and had killed Johnny to reduce opposition to the minimum. He, himself, had been permitted to live until the cave cat learned from his mind how to operate the almost-automatic controls. Now, he had served his purpose--

"_You are wrong._"

Again there was no way he could determine the direction from which the thought came. He listened again, and wondered why it had not waylaid him at the door.

Its thought came:

"_I had to let you see me or you would not have believed I existed. It

was only here that I could extinguish all lights and have time to speak before you killed me. I let you think your brother was here...._" There was a little pause. "_I am sorry. I am sorry. I should have used some other method of luring you here._"

He swung the blaster toward what seemed to be a faint sound near the astrogator unit across the room.

"_We did not intend to kill your brother._"

He did not believe it and did not reply.

"_When we made first telepathic contact with him, he jerked up his blaster and fired. In his mind was the conviction that we had pretended to be harmless animals so that we could catch him off-guard and kill him. One of us leaped at him as he fired the second time, to knock the blaster from his hand. We needed only a few minutes in which to explain--but he would not trust us that long. There was a misjudgment of distance and he was knocked off the cliff._"

Again he did not reply.

"_We did not intend to kill your brother_, " the thought came, "_but you do not believe me_."

* * * * *

He spoke for the first time. "No, I don't believe you. You are physically like cats and cats don't misjudge distances. Now, you want something from me before you try to kill me, too. What is it?"

"_I will have to tell you of my race for you to understand. We call ourselves the Varn, in so far as it can be translated into a spoken word, and we are a very old race. In the beginning we did not live in caves but there came a long period of time, for thousands of years, when the climate on our world was so violent that we were forced to live in the caves. It was completely dark there but our sense of smell became very acute, together with sufficient sensitivity to temperature changes that we could detect objects in our immediate vicinity. There were subterranean plants in the caves and food was no problem._"

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"_We had always been slightly telepathic and it was during our long stay in the caves that our intelligence and telepathic powers became fully developed. We had only our minds--physical science is not created in dark caves with clumsy paws._"

"_The time finally came when we could leave the caves but it was of

little help to us. There were no resources on our world but earth and stone and the thin grass of the plains. We wondered about the universe and we knew the stars were distant suns because one of our own suns became a star each winter. We studied as best we could but we could see the stars only as the little wild animals saw them. There was so much we wanted to learn and by then we were past our zenith and already dying out. But our environment was a prison from which we could never escape._

"_When your ship arrived we thought we might soon be free. We wanted to ask you to take some of us with you and arrange for others of your race to stop by on our world. But you dismissed us as animals, useful only for making warm fur coats, because we lived in caves and had no science, no artifacts--nothing. You had the power to destroy us and we did not know what your reaction would be when you learned we were intelligent and telepathic. A telepathic race must have a high code of ethics and never intrude unwanted--but would you have believed that?_"

He did not answer.

"_The death of your brother changed everything. You were going to leave so soon that there would be no time to learn more about you. I hid on the ship so I could study you and wait until I could prove to you that you needed me. Now, I can--Throon is dying and I can give you the proper words of explanation that will cause the others to bring him into the ship._"

"Your real purpose--what is it?" he asked.

"_To show you that men need the Varn. You want to explore the galaxy, and learn. So do the Varn. You have the ships and we have the telepathic ability that will end the communication problem. Your race and mine can succeed only if we go together._"

He searched for the true, and hidden, purpose behind the Varn proposal and saw what it would have to be.

"The long-range goal--you failed to mention that ... your ultimate aim."

"_I know what you are thinking. How can I prove you wrong--now?_"

There was no way for the Varn to prove him wrong, nor for him to prove the treachery behind the Varn proposal. The proof would come only with time, when the Terran-Varn co-operation had transformed Terrans into a slave race.

The Varn spoke again. "_You refuse to believe I am sincere?_"

"I would be a naive fool to believe you."

"_It will be too late to save Throon unless we act very quickly. I have told you why I am here. There is nothing more I can do to convince you but be the first to show trust. When I switch on the lights it will be within your power to kill me._"

* * * * *

The Varn was gambling its life in a game in which he would be gambling the Plan and his race. It was a game he would end at the first sound of movement from the astrogator unit across the room....

"_I have been here beside you all the time._"

A furry paw brushed his face, claws flicked gently but grimly reminding along his throat.

He whirled and fired. He was too late--the Varn had already leaped silently away and the beam found only the bare floor. Then the lights came on, glaringly bright after the darkness, and he saw the Varn.

It was standing by the control board, its huge yellow eyes watching him. He brought the blaster into line with it, his finger on the firing stud. It waited, not moving or shrinking from what was coming. The translucent golden eyes looked at him and beyond him, as though they saw something not in the room. He wondered if it was in contact with its own kind on Johnny's World and was telling them it had made the gamble for high stakes, and had lost.

It was not afraid--not asking for mercy....

The killing of it was suddenly an act without savor. It was something he would do in the immediate future but first he would let it live long enough to save Throon.

He motioned with the blaster and said, "Lead the way to the airlock."

"_And afterward--you will kill me?_"

"Lead the way," he repeated harshly.

It said no more but went obediently past him and trotted down the corridor like a great, black dog.

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He stood in the open airlock, the Varn against the farther wall where he had ordered it to stand. Throon was in the radiation chamber and he had held his first intelligible conversation with the natives that day.

The Varn was facing into the red-black gloom outside the lighted airlock, where the departing natives could be heard crossing the glade. "_Their thoughts no longer hold fear and suspicion_" it said. "_The misunderstanding is ended._"

He raised the muzzle of the blaster in his hand. The black head lifted and the golden eyes looked up at him.

"I made you no promise," he said.

"_I could demand none._"

"I can't stop to take you back to your own world and I can't leave you alive on this one--with what you've learned from my mind you would have the natives build the Varn a disintegrator-equipped space fleet equal to our own ships."

"_We want only to go with you._"

He told it what he wanted it to know before he killed it, wondering why he should care:

"I would like to believe you are sincere--and you know why I don't dare to. Trusting a telepathic race would be too dangerous. The Varn would know everything we knew and only the Varn would be able to communicate with each new alien race. We would have to believe what the Varn told us--we would have to trust the Varn to see for us and speak for us and not deceive us as we went across the galaxy. And then, in the end, Terrans would no longer be needed except as a subject race. They would be enslaved.

"We would have laid the groundwork for an empire--the Varn Empire."

There was a silence, in which his words hung like something cold and invisible between them.

Then the Varn asked, very quietly:

"_Why is the Plan failing?_"

"You already know," he said. "Because of the barrier--the communication barrier that causes aliens to misunderstand the intentions of Exploration men and fear them."

"_There is no communication barrier between you and I--yet you fear me and are going to kill me._"

"I have to kill you. You represent a danger to my race."

"_Isn't that the same reason why aliens kill Exploration men?_"

He did not answer and his thought came, quickly, "_How does an Exploration man appear to the natives of alien worlds?_"

How did he appear?... He landed on their world in a ship that could smash it into oblivion; he stepped out of his ship carrying weapons that could level a city; he represented irresistible power for destruction and he trusted no one and nothing.

And in return he hoped to find welcome and friendship and co-operation....

"_There_" the Varn said, "_is your true barrier--your own distrust and suspicion. You, yourselves, create it on each new world. Now you are going to erect it between my race and yours by killing me and advising the Exploration Board to quarantine my world and never let another ship land there._"

Again there was a silence as he thought of what the Varn had said and of what it had said earlier: "_We are a very old race...._" There was wisdom in the Varn's analysis of the cause of the Plan's failure and with the Varn to vanquish the communication stalemate, the new approach could be tried. They could go a long way together, men and Varn, a long, long way....

Or they could create the Varn Empire ... and how could he know which it would be?

How could anyone know--except the telepathic Varn?

The muzzle of the blaster had dropped and he brought it back up. He forced the dangerous indecision aside, knowing he would have to kill the Varn at once or he might weaken again, and said harshly to it:

"The risk is too great. I want to believe you--but all your talk of trust and good intentions is only talk and my race would be the only one that had to trust."

He touched the firing stud as the last thought of the Varn came:

"_Let me speak once more._"

He waited, the firing stud cold and metallic under his finger.

"_You are wrong. We have already set the example of faith in you by asking to go with you. I told you we did not intend to hurt your brother and I told you we saw the stars only as the little wild animals saw them. The years in the dark caves--you do not understand--_"

The eyes of the Varn looked into his and beyond him; beautiful, expressionless, like polished gold.

"_The Varn are blind._"

THE END

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